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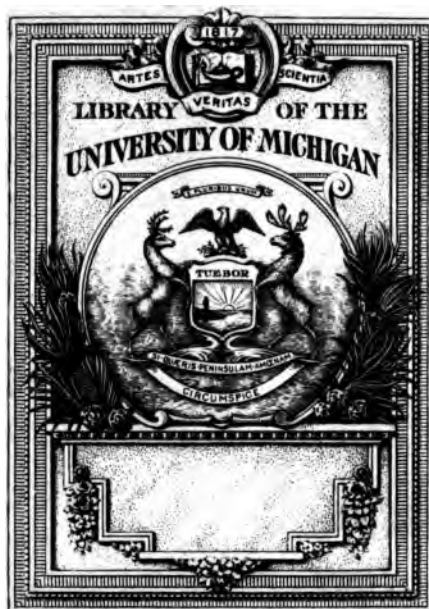
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Stael-Holstein. Influence of literature upon society.



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INFLUENCE OF LITERATURE

UPON

SOCIETY.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH

OF

*cause of the (French) language*  
MADAME DE STAEL-HOLSTEIN

TO WHICH IS PREFIXED,

A MEMOIR OF THE LIFE AND WRITINGS OF THE AUTHOR

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## A CONCISE ACCOUNT

OF

# THE PRIVATE AND LITERARY LIFE

OF THE

## BARONESS DE STAEL-HOLSTEIN.

To become the depositary of those literary productions which the conscience of tyrants might be anxious to destroy, is one of the many eminent prerogatives of a free people living in the midst of nations that are enslaved; and of all the works which England has snatched from the unjust condemnation of the atrocious factions and oppressive violence under which France has groaned these twenty years, there are few more worthy of being preserved than the *Essay of the Baroness de Stael-Holstein on Literature, considered in its relations to social institutions*. Having witnessed the fatal consequences of a revolution, the storms of which were experienced alike by social institutions and literature, Madame de Stael was led to examine the mutual influence of religion, morals, and laws upon literature, and of literature upon religion, morals, and laws; and while she traced the progressive advances of nations towards literary eminence, she established the degree of perfection which this twofold influence has allowed them to attain.

The most enlightened philosophers have acknowledged perfectibility to be the lot of man in general; but none before Madame de Stael had ever applied it to literature in particular. This prudent restriction proved, however, inefficient to guard her against the unjust attacks of the feeble or wicked minds of those by whom the tenet is reprobated, because their foolish vanity or their criminal ambition represent the principles by which they are influenced, and the measures which they order, as absolutely perfect. They stigmatize as presumptuous those who believe in the possibility of doing better than has been done hitherto; while they themselves have the arrogance to fancy they are patterns of perfection. Dazzled by their vain errors they do not perceive that those who adopt the system of perfectibility, found it upon the principle that perfection is not within the reach of man, but that it is the object, to which religion and morality teach him to aspire. It is this object, which is never attained, that distinguishes mankind from the brute creation, and constitutes individuality. He who is nearest to perfection may still be excelled by those who follow: but of all the competitors that press forward in the same career, none ever stop precisely at the same point. Were it not for perfectibility all men would be alike.

The account which I am attempting to give of the private and literary life of Madame de Stael, will no doubt appear unsatisfactory to those who are desirous of being acquainted with the most minute biographical details of a lady whose writings have justly conferred on their author a great degree of celebrity. But, independently of the regard due to every living author, I have been prevented, by the present restrained communication with the continent, from obtaining that degree of information which might throw some interest upon this memoir.

Wilhelmina Necker is the daughter of James Necker and Susan Curchod. She was born in 1768, at Paris, where she was educated under the immediate superintendence of her parents. She had not reached her tenth year, when her father, who had acquired a considerable fortune as a partner in the house of a banker named Thellusson, and who, by some political pamphlets, particularly an eulogy of Colbert, which was crowned by the French Academy, had acquired an incipient celebrity, was appointed to the direction of the finances of France under Lewis XVI. Her mother, whose virtues and talents had attracted the admiration of Gibbon during his residence in Switzerland, was the daughter of a Protestant clergyman. As he had endowed her with learning superior to her sex, she had, before her marriage, been a governess in the family of Madame de Vermeux. Unacquainted with the Parisian manners, Madame Necker possessed none of the attractions of French women: but modesty, candor, and good-nature gave her charms of greater value. A virtuous education and solitary studies, save Marmontel, adorned her mind with all that instruction can add to an excellent natural understanding. She had no fault but a too passionate attachment to literature and an unbounded desire of obtaining a great celebrity for herself and for her husband. A kind mother, a faithful friend, a most affectionate wife, she united all the true characteristics of virtue, a firm religious belief, and a great elevation of soul. Her thoughts were pure: meditation, however, did not tend to enlighten her ideas; in amplifying them she thought to improve them, but in extending them she lost herself in hyperboles and metaphysical abstractions. She seemed to behold certain objects through a mist, which

magnified them to her eyes; her expressions, on such occasions, became so bombastic, that their meaning would have appeared ridiculous, had it not been known to be ingenuous. It might be truly said of her, that religion and justice formed the ground-work of all her duties. Her conduct proved at all times irreproachable and exemplary.

No sooner was Mr Necker appointed to the management of the finances, than Madame Necker made his power serve to enlarge the exercise of her active benevolence. She contributed to the improvement of the internal regulations of the infirmaries of the metropolis, and undertook the special superintendence of an hospital which she founded at her own expense, near Paris, and which became the model of foundations of that kind. All her literary productions attest her care for suffering humanity. Her *Essay on too precipitate Burials*, her *Observations on the founding of Hospitals*, and her *Thoughts on Divorce*, breathe an ardent zeal for the happiness of her fellow-creatures; and her sentiments were always in unison with her writings.

To make her husband known, to gain him the favour of literary men, the dispensers of fame, and to cause him to be handsomely spoken of in the highest circles, Madame Necker had formed a literary society, which used to meet once a week at her house. Along with *Thomas*, *Buffon*, *Diderot*, *Marmontel*, *Saint Lambert*, and other celebrated writers, who attended these meetings, they were honoured by the most distinguished residents of foreign courts, especially the *Marquis de Caraccioli*, ambassador of Naples, *Lord Stormont*, the ambassador of Great Britain, and *Count de Creutz*, the Swedish ambassador, whose mild philosophy, modest virtue, and eminent talents, received every where an equal share of esteem and admiration.

But, of all the academicians with whom Madame Necker had associated, in order to strengthen her mind by the aid of their genius, she placed none upon a level with *Thomas* and *Buffon*. The former she used to call the *man of the age*, and the latter the *man of all ages*. The veneration and attachment which she felt for these two persons, bordered on adoration; she considered their authority as part of her creed. It was particularly in the school of *Thomas*, a school so fertile in tinsel wit and confused metaphysics, that she became a slave to that affected style which, as it is continually aiming at elevation and grandeur, conceals her amiable mind, and fatigues, without interesting the reader.

Under the guidance of such a mother, Miss Necker acquired with ease that immense variety of knowledge which astonishes in her writings, and that brilliant superiority of style which renders their study so delightful, notwithstanding a degree of affectation which they occasionally betray, though much less frequently than the works of Madame Necker. Charmed with their early display, her parents neglected nothing to cultivate her talents. They were soon enabled to devote all their time to this object in a rural retreat.

Miss Necker was scarcely thirteen years old, when her father, impelled by an eager desire of praise, which tormented him during the whole course of his life, published the *Account rendered to the king of his administration*, and availing himself of the unexampled success with which it was received throughout France, demanded to be admitted into the privy council. It was in vain that his religion was urged as an obstacle. He flattered himself that the fear of losing him would overcome this religious scruple: he persisted, and threatened to resign; but he became the victim of his presumption. His resignation was accepted on the 25th of May, 1781. He retired to Switzerland, where he bought the baronial manor of Copet, and he there published his work on the administration of the finances.

At the end of a few years, Mr Necker re-appeared occasionally at Paris, those of his friends who were

truly his, and not the friends of his situation, visited his house as they had done while he was in office. Count de Creutz introduced to him the Baron de Stael Holstein, who had just been sent to him from Sweden, as one of the Swedish embassy, and the latter was immediately admitted into Mr Necker's society. Young, and of a handsome figure, he had the good fortune to please Miss Necker. As the king of Sweden shortly after recalled Count de Creutz, in order to place him at the head of the department of foreign affairs, in his own country, he was succeeded by the Baron de Stael Holstein. Invested with the dignity of a Swedish ambassador at the court of France, and professing the Protestant religion, Baron de Stael soon became the envied husband of a rich heiress who had been courted in vain by many French noblemen. His happiness however was not much to be envied; not that Madame de Stael was without attractions. Her appearance, though not handsome, was agreeable; her deportment noble. She was of the middle size, graceful in her expressions and in her manners. She had much vivacity in her eyes, and much acuteness in her countenance, which seemed to heighten the pointed wit of her remarks. Her faults consisted in too great a carelessness in her dress and an extreme desire of shining in conversation. She spoke little, but in aphorisms, and with the evident intention to produce effect. The unhappy anxiety to become renowned, which she derived from her father, and the pedantic tone which she could not help contracting in the society of her mother and Mr Thomas, must no doubt have been disagreeable to a man, simple and unaffected in his words and actions. But it was chiefly the great superiority of her talents over those of the Baron, that soon destroyed that happy harmony which reigns among couples more equally allied in this respect. The distance was indeed immense. The Baron had even few of those light graces by means of which French vivacity frequently conceals a want of intellectual resources.

It was, however, in consequence of this marriage, that Mr Necker settled again in France, at a time when the prodigality of his successor in the financial department must necessarily have increased his reputation. But as *Mr de Calonne* had attacked the veracity of his *Account* presented to the king, in the speech he pronounced at the opening of the meeting of the Notables in 1787, Mr Necker sent a justification of this account to Louis XVI; and although the monarch expressly desired that it might not become known, his love of importance and glory could not keep him from publishing it. As soon as the king was informed that his answer to the speech of *Mr de Calonne* was printed, he banished him to the distance of forty leagues from Paris. The Baroness de Stael, who in the month of August of the same year had given birth to a daughter, accompanied her father in his exile. It lasted only four months. On the 25th of August, 1788, the king recalled Mr Necker into administration immediately after he had published his work *On the Importance of Religious Opinions*.

The period of this second ministerial reign, which on the 11th of July, 1789, ended in a second exile, is the time when Madame de Stael entered the thorny path of literature. She began with some *Letters on the Writings and Character of J. J. Rousseau*, which met with deserved applause. The third edition is enriched with a letter of Madame de Vassy, and an answer to it by Madame de Stael. But prior to this time, and ere she had reached the age of twenty, she had tried her talents in writing three short novels, which she printed at Lausanne in 1795, with an *Essay on Fictions* and a poetic *Epistle to Misfortune*, composed during the tyranny of Robespierre and his infamous coadjutors; the whole under the title of a *Collection of detached Pieces*, the second edition of which was published, with corrections and additions, at Leipzig in

1796. In one of these short novels, called *Mirza*, Madame de Stael appears to have anticipated the plan which the African society of London is now endeavouring to realize. She makes a traveller in Senegal relate that 'the governor had induced a negro family to settle at the distance of a few leagues, in order to establish a plantation similar to those of St Domingo; hoping, no doubt, that such an example would excite the Africans to raise sugar, and that a free trade with this commodity in their own country would leave no inducement to Europeans to snatch them from their native soil, in order to submit them to the dreadful yoke of slavery.'

In her *Essay on Fictions*, Madame de Stael has endeavored to prove that novels, which should give a sagacious, eloquent, profound, and moral picture of real life, would be the most useful of all kinds of fictions. The imitation of truth constantly produces greater effects than are produced by supernatural means. Those protracted allegories, wherein, as in *Spenser's Fairy Queen*, each canto relates the battle of a knight representing a virtue against a vice his adversary, can never be interesting, whatever be the talent by which they are embellished. The reader arrives at the end, so fatigued with the romantic part of the allegory, that he has no strength left to understand its philosophical meaning. As for these allegories which aim at mingling jocular wit with moral ideas, Madame de Stael thinks that they attain their philosophical object but very imperfectly. When the allegory is really entertaining, most men remember its fable better than its result. *Gulliver* has afforded more amusement as a tale, than instruction as a moral composition.

Madame de Stael disapproves of novels founded upon historical facts. She pleads for natural fictions, and wishes to see the gift of exciting emotions applied to the passions of all ages, to the duties of all situations. Among the works of this kind, *Tom Jones* is that of which the moral is the most general. Love, in this novel, is introduced merely to heighten the philosophical result. To demonstrate the uncertainty of judgments built upon appearances, to show the superiority of natural and, as it were, involuntary qualities over reputations grounded on the mere respect of outward decorum, is the true object of *Tom Jones*. *Goodwin's Caleb Williams*, with all its tedious details and negligences, appears likewise to answer Madame de Stael's ideas of the inexhaustible kind of novels to which she alludes. Love has no share in the groundwork of his fiction. The unbridled passion of the hero of the novel for a distinguished reputation, and the insatiable curiosity of Caleb that leads him to ascertain whether Falkland deserves the esteem which he enjoys, are the only supports of the interest of the narrative.

These correct views show how intimately Madame de Stael was acquainted with English Literature even in her younger years. But she was not long permitted to enjoy her first literary successes in peace. The crisis of the revolution, which embittered her life, was fast approaching.

On the 11th of July, 1789, her father was going to sit down to table with several guests, when the Secretary of state for the naval department came to him, took him aside, and delivered to him a letter from the king, which commanded him to resign and to quit the French territory in silence. Madame Necker, whose health was rather precarious, did not take with her any domestic, nor any change of apparel, that their departure might not be suspected. They made use of the carriage in which they generally took a ride in the evening and hastened onwards night and day towards

their agitation, they had silently quitted France, their home, and their friends. Mr Necker set off from Brussels accompanied only by the Baron de Stael, to go to Basle through Germany. Madame Necker and the Baroness de Stael followed with a little less precipitation. They were overtaken at Frankfurt by the bearer of letters from the king and the national assembly, which recalled Mr Necker for a third time into administration. As soon as Madame de Stael and her mother had joined him at Basle, he resolved to return to France. This journey from Basle, to Paris was the most interesting moment of Madame de Stael's life. Her father was as it were borne in triumph, and she anticipated for the future none but happy days.

But these deceitful hopes were very soon vanished. During the fifteen months of his being in office for the last time, Mr Necker was constantly involved in a fruitless struggle in behalf of the executive power, and as he saw no prospect of being useful, he retired to his estate at Copet towards the end of 1790. Madame de Stael shortly after followed him thither. She returned to Paris in the first months of 1791, and took perhaps a more lively concern in the political events of the day than became the wife of a foreign ambassador. It has even been asserted, that, moved by the misfortune with which Louis XVI. was threatened, she formed the project of saving him by affording him a secret retreat at an estate of the Duke of Orleans in Normandy, which was then to be disposed of: but the king preferred to entrust himself to Count de Ferseu, and took the road to Montmidi. She has also been reproached for her intimacy with M. de Talleyrand Perigord, at that time bishop of Autun, Viscount Noailles, the Lamoths, Barnave, Count Louis de Narbonne, Vergniaud, and other distinguished members of the constituent and first legislative assemblies; and it has been said that she accompanied Count Narbonne on his circuit to inspect the fortresses of the frontiers, immediately after his having been called to the head of the war department towards the end of 1791. Be this as it may, it is certain that she continued at Paris with her husband until the reign of terror. It was only in 1793 that she fled with him to Copet, and thence went over to England, where she resided several months. They did not return to France till the year 1795, after the Duke of Sudermannia, regent of the kingdom of Sweden, during the minority of the unfortunate Gustavus Adolphus IV., had appointed Baron de Stael his ambassador with the French republic. It was also nearly about this time that Madame de Stael published her *Thoughts on Peace*, addressed to Mr Pitt and the French People, which the illustrious Fox quoted in the House of Commons in support of his arguments for peace, and to which Sir Francis d'Ivernois replied by his *Thoughts on War*.

It is possible that, born with a lively disposition, and anxiously wishing for the return of order and tranquillity, Madame de Stael frequently armed herself with all her eloquence to animate her friends, in those disastrous times, to put an end to troubles that were continually renewed. In 1795, Legendre, that Parisian butcher, who was the friend of Marat, Danton, and Robespierre, declaimed more than once against her as being at the head of the intrigues that had a tendency to moderation. She says somewhere in her work on literature: 'If, to heighten her misfortune, it were in the midst of political dissensions that a female should acquire a remarkable celebrity, her influence would be supposed unbounded; though null in reality; she would be accused of the deeds of her friends; she would be hated for whatever is dear to her, and the defenceless objects would be attacked in preference to those who might not be feared.' and it is her own experience

conduct of their passions. Her having said, along with the Abbe Sieyes, that the constitution of 1795 'was not yet the good one,' has been imputed to her as a crime.

While ~~calamity~~ was ~~exacerbating~~ her days, her feeling heart was doomed to a more severe misfortune. Mr Necker having informed her that there ~~was no~~ hope of his wife's recovery from a long illness, which actually terminated her life shortly after, Madame de Stael eagerly hastened to her dying mother. She found her extremely weak. Madame Necker was fond of hearing music during her illness: every evening she went for some musicians, in order that the impression she received from harmonious sounds might keep her soul alive to those sublime thoughts from which alone death derives a character of melancholy and tranquillity. Once, during the last days of her sufferings, the musicians having neglected coming, Mr Necker requested his daughter to perform on the piano. After having played a few sonatas, she began to sing a song of Sacchini's composition, in his *Edipus at Colona*, the words of which recall the cares of Antigone.\* Her father, on hearing this, shed a flood of tears, and threw himself at the feet of his dying consort. His profound emotion caused Madame de Stael to give over singing. On the very last day of Madame Necker's life, wind-instruments were still heard in a room close to her bed-chamber when she had already ceased to live. 'To describe,' says Madame de Stael, 'the melancholy contrast between the varied expressions of the musical sounds, and the uniform feeling of sadness with which death filled the heart, is impossible.' Thomas, who has celebrated Madame Necker in his verses addressed to Susanna, has left an indirect eulogy of her in his *Essay on Women*. 'Truly estimable,' says this academician, 'is the female who, though she has imbibed in the great world the charms of society, such as good taste, grace and wit, knows how to preserve her heart and her understanding from that unfeeling vanity and that false sensibility, the offspring of the higher circles; who, reluctantly obliged to submit to social forms and usages, never loses sight of nature, and by whom nature is yet regretted; who, forced by her rank to expense and luxury, prefers at least useful expenses, and enables industrious poverty to share in her wealth; who, while she cultivates literature and philosophy, loves these pursuits for their own sake and not for a vain reputation; she in fine who, in the midst of levity, does not lose her natural character; who, in the bustle of the world, retains a firm mind; who owns her friend in the midst of those by whom he is slandered; who boldly undertakes his defence, though he is never to know it; and who at home and abroad reserves her esteem for virtue, her contempt for vice, and her heart for friendship.' In order to assuage her grief for the loss of a parent, in every respect entitled to the most poignant regret, and to repel the malicious attacks to which she was exposed for opinions which were not hers, Madame de Stael composed at Lausanne the first part of a philosophical *Essay on the influence of the passions upon the happiness of individuals and nations*, which she published at Paris in 1796, and of which she printed the second part in 1797. The merit of this work has been acknowledged alike in France, in England and in Germany. It abounds in interesting remarks, and views many objects in a novel and striking manner. Its style is elegant throughout, and but very rarely obscure. It was translated into English in 1798.

Madame de Stael was with her father at Copet when the French troops entered Switzerland. By one of the decrees passed during the reign of terror, Mr Necker, although an alien, had been placed on the list of emigrants, and any one, whose name was on that

French generals showed him the most respectful regard, and the Directory afterwards erased his name from the list.

This moderation induced Madame de Stael to repair once more to her husband in France. But at the end of a few months she grew tired of the various persecutions to which she was unceasingly exposed, and hastened back to her father, upbraiding herself for being unable to live like him in solitude, and to exist without that competition of thoughts and glory which doubles our existence and our powers.

In 1798, the declining health of Baron de Stael again called Madame de Stael to Paris, where he expired in her arms. About this time she published a work *On the influence of Revolutions upon Literature*, of which I have not been able to procure a copy; nor have I seen a dramatic piece of her composition called *The Secret Sentiment*. Madame de Stael, after the death of her husband, spent the greatest part of her time with her father at Copet and at Lausanne.

In 1800, when Buonaparte passed through Geneva, he had the curiosity to visit Mr Necker at Copet, where Madame de Stael happened to be with her father. The interview was not long, but it has been reported that Madame de Stael requested a private audience, during which she spoke to the First Consul of the powerful means which his situation afforded him to provide for the happiness of France, and made an eloquent display of some plans of her own, which she thought particularly calculated to accomplish this object. Buonaparte appeared to give her an attentive hearing: but when she ceased to speak, he coldly asked, 'Who educates your children, madame?'

It was chiefly in Switzerland that Madame de Stael wrote the novel called *Delphine*, the first edition of which was printed at Geneva in 1802. The moral object of this novel has been equally mistaken in France, England, and Germany, and yet it has been read every where with the same eagerness. It has had four or five editions in France, and has been translated in English and German, while the *Anti-Delphine* of a very sensible English young lady, which has drawn sweet tears from the eyes of tender females, has met with few readers in England, where Madame de Stael's novel has been loudly condemned.

The severity of the criticisms which from every corner of Europe were directed against a work written with a captivating energy of style, drew from the author an ingenious defence:—'In most novels, which have a moral object,' says Madame de Stael, 'personages that are perfect are contrasted with others who are completely odious. Such writings, I think, leave no impression on the only class of readers that are capable of amendment, namely, those who are both weak and honest. Utility consists in inspiring the dread of faults committed by beings that are naturally virtuous, delicate, and feeling; to these alone good advice may be serviceable; they alone may be deterred by a fatal example.—The vicious are, by their nature, so different from us, that whatever we may write effects no conviction in their minds: their language, sentiments, hopes and fears are so different; and nothing can have any effect upon them except the events of their own life. I need not observe, I hope, that a dramatic writer does not approve of the characters he delineates, and that, whether he paints a train of error and their fatal consequences, or a series of good actions and their rewards, he is still a severe moralist. I am almost ashamed to be obliged to repeat notions which are every where so fully acknowledged that they are deemed superfluous.'

One day Mr Necker, in a conversation with his

assertion, he composed a tale, entitled *The Fatal Consequences of a Single Error*, which Madame de Stael has inserted in the manuscripts of her father published at Geneva in 1804.

In the mean time, Madame de Stael could not habituate herself to live in a country which is not her native one, and where sciences are much more cultivated than literature. Her father perceived her struggles between her predilection for the brilliant societies at Paris and the sorrow she felt at the idea of leaving him. Though, in his character of a wise parent, he ought to have condemned, in a widow, the mother of three children, this fatal propensity for seeking happiness only in the crowded assemblies of the great world, whose votaries alike extol the sallies of false wit and the effusions of genius, to be applauded in their turn, Mr Necker, who himself was not yet cured of the same disease, encouraged her partiality for France. Fond of the remembrance which he had left behind in that country, he endeavored with all his might to preserve its affection for his family. As Madame de Stael was perhaps actuated by the secret desire of shining at the court of the First Consul, or at least of collecting in the metropolis of the French republic the flattering mood of praise due to her last literary successes, she easily yielded to the persuasions of her father, and he appeared at Paris in 1803. But her residence in that city was not of long duration. Whether the watchful activity of her superior genius, was still feared, or that she had ventured too sarcastic observations upon the events of the day, or whether the First Consul had so little generosity as to be revenged on the daughter for a work published against the consular government by the father, Buonaparte soon pronounced against her a sentence of banishment to the distance of forty leagues from Paris; and it has been reported that Madame de Stael had the noble firmness to say to him: 'You are giving me a cruel celebrity; I shall occupy a line in your history.'

Madame de Stael at first retired to Auxerre; but not meeting with suitable society, she thought she might settle at Rouen; and as this city is only thirty-two leagues from Paris, she even fancied she might draw a little nearer to the metropolis, and took a house in the valley of Montmorency. But the French government ordered her to withdraw within the limits assigned in the sentence of her exile; she then set out for Frankfort, attended by her eldest daughter, and accompanied by the ex-tribune Benjamin Constant, her faithful protector. From Frankfort Madame de Stael repaired, in the midst of a severe winter, to the dominions of the king of Prussia, where she formed plans destined to make the French acquainted with German literature. In the spring of the year 1804 she felt herself happy at Berlin, the society of which city pleased her much; when, on the morning of the 18th of April, a friend brought her letters which informed her of her father's illness. She immediately set off, and until she reached Weimar, the idea that she might be deceived, that her father might be no more, had never entered her mind. Mr Necker had however died at Geneva on the 9th of April, 1804, after a short but painful illness. During his fever he expressed frequent apprehensions that his last work might prove fatal to his daughter, and in his delirium he often blessed her and her three children.

This unexpected blow changed the destiny of Madame de Stael. After her tears had flown in abundance upon the grave of a father whom she had affectionately loved, she sought for some alleviation to her grief in selecting the most interesting fragments among Mr Necker's papers; and published them at Geneva in

1804, together with a short account of the character and private life of her father, under the title of *Manuscripts of Mr Necker, published by his daughter*. She took care to insert in them a compliment paid to the character of Buonaparte in these words: 'The first consul is eminently distinguished by his firm and decisive character; it is a splendid will which seizes every thing, regulates every thing, fixes every thing, and which always moves and stops at the proper time. This faculty, which I describe after a great model, is the first quality for the chief ruler of a great empire. In the end, it is considered as a law of nature, and all opposition vanishes.' This mean flattery on the part of a man who had ruined France, to introduce republican forms, produced no alteration in the disposition of the First Consul towards Madame de Stael. The sentence of her banishment was not revoked, and the novel of *Corinna*, which appeared soon after Buonaparte had been raised to the imperial throne, has probably rendered it irrevocable.

To dispel her sadness and gloom, Madame de Stael determined to travel over the fine countries of Italy. The constant serenity of the sky, the variety of landscapes, a delightful music, and the contemplation of the ruins of that superb Rome, formerly mistress of the world, insensibly revived her talents and her enthusiasm, and even gave renewed elasticity to her genius. It is to this journey that learned Europe is indebted for *Corinna or Italy*, that splendid monument of the fine taste, the profound erudition, the lively sensibility and the ardent imagination of its author. The mind finds some difficulty in conceiving the combination of talents which that work possesses. It is written with an eloquence bordering on the sublime; it breathes throughout the purest attachment to the true principles of civil liberty; and England and Italy are contrasted in a manner little calculated to please those who would wish to destroy every free country. The exclamation of Corinna at the sight of the Roman forum: 'Honour then, everlasting honour to all courageous and free nations, since they thus captivate the attention of posterity!' resounds disagreeably in the ears of despots.

After this effort of genius, Madame de Stael, by way of relaxation, amused herself first with performing in tragedy at Geneva, and afterwards assuming the modest office of an editor. Some time after the appearance of *Corinna*, she published two volumes of *Letters and Reflections of Prince de Ligne*, and enriched them with a short preface worthy of her talents. I have given an English translation of this work, to which I attach some little value, because it has afforded me an opportunity of associating my name with that of such an editor; it is only in this character that I may be allowed to aspire to that honour. The literary world is anxiously expecting the work which Madame de Stael had commenced in 1804 upon Germany.

Far be it from me to imitate the numerous slanderers who have taken particular delight in publishing the errors of Madame de Stael, and falsely adding to their number. It belongs only to the pen of history which will immortalize her merit, to reveal the weaknesses by which that merit may be obscured. It is possible that Madame de Stael, as has been observed by her father, may be 'very susceptible of being misled;' she may sometimes have been guilty of 'an amiable thoughtlessness,' as Marmontel calls it: but she never can be dispossessed of the first rank among female authors who, in our times, have shed a lustre on French literature.

D. BOILEAU.

Brompton Road, Nov. 1st. 1811.



## INTRODUCTION.

The object of the present work is to examine what influence Religion, Manners, and Laws, have upon Literature; and reciprocally, how far Literature may effect Laws, Manners, and Religion. On the art of composition and the principles of taste there are extant, in the French tongue, treatises\* the most accurate and complete: but it appears to me, that sufficient pains have not been taken to analyze the moral and political causes which modify and mark the character of Literature. Neither do I think that any attempt has hitherto been made to consider philosophically the gradual development of the human faculties, as it displays itself in the distinguished works that have afforded delight or instruction to mankind, from the age of Homer down to the present time.

The works of celebrity which have appeared in every age, afford unequivocal proofs of the successive progress and improvement of the human understanding. I have endeavored to explain the slow but unceasing advance of the mental powers, in the field of Philosophy, and their rapid but desultory strides in the career of the Arts. From a curious observation of the characteristic traits which distinguish the contemporary writings of the Italians and the English, of the Germans and the French, I hold it to be demonstrable, that political and religious institutions had a principal share in the production of these continual diversities. Finally, from contemplating the gloom of despair and the dawn of hope which the French Revolution has, if I may be allowed the expression, confounded together; I deemed it of some importance to ascertain what degree of influence that revolution has exerted upon the state of knowledge, and what are the probable consequences that may hereafter result from it, should liberty and order, republican, morality and independence, be wisely and politically combined.

But before I proceed farther to unfold the plan of the present work, it may be proper to touch a little upon the importance and advantages of literature, considered in its widest acceptation; that is, as it embraces the dogmas of philosophy and the effusions of imagination;—every thing, in fine, connected with the operations of thought, with the exclusion only of physical and experimental science.

My first object, then, will be to take a general survey of literature as it is connected with virtue, with glory, with liberty, and with happiness: and if it be acknowledged without the possibility of contradiction, that it has a powerful influence upon these sublime sentiments, these master-springs of the human soul;

\* *The works of Voltaire, Marmontel, and La Harpe.*

how much more lively must be the interest with which, I flatter myself, the reader will accompany me in retracing the progress and observing the predominant character of the writers who have honoured every country and graced every age! Oh! that I could win over every enlightened mind to the pursuit and enjoyment of philosophical meditations! But it frequently happens, that the contemporaries and eye-witnesses of a revolution cease to take any interest in the investigation of truth. The issue of so many events decided by force; the atrocity of so many crimes wiped off by success; the lustre of so many virtues tarnished by calumny; the sacredness of so many misfortunes profaned by the insolence of power; the dignity of so many generous sentiments sunk into objects of ridicule and scorn; the meanness of low calculations raised into subjects of philosophical discussion:—all these things tend to discourage and deaden hope, even in the breasts of men the most zealously devoted to the homage of reason. It should, however, re-animate their desponding spirits, to observe, that there is not to be found in the history of the human mind an useful discovery or a profound truth that does not carry the mark of its own age, and claim its peculiar admirers. Yet, doubtless, it is a melancholy reflection, that we must have to wade through futurity, to transfer our interest, and repose our hopes on posterity, on foreigners, or strangers, who can come in no point of contact with us; in a word, on the whole mass of mankind, the recollection or image of whom can never come home to our hearts or understandings. But, alas! with the exception of a few select unalterable friends, the majority of those whom we recall to mind, after ten years of a Revolution, only sadden the soul, stifle its emotions, and over-awe the talents one may possess, not by any superiority on their part, but by the influence of that malevolence which gives pain only to delicate minds, and grieves those only who deserve to be strangers to sorrow.

Let us, then, raise ourselves above the pressures of life: let us not furnish our unmerited enemies, nor our ungrateful friends, with any opportunity to boast of having dejected our intellectual powers. Their malicious attempts will only compel those who would have remained satisfied with cultivating the milder affections, to aspire to the pursuit of glory. Since, then, it must be so; let us grasp at the bright attainment. These efforts of ambition will, indeed, be of little avail to assuage the sorrows of the soul; but they will shed a gleam of honour on the career of life. To devote our days wholly to the ever-deceitful hopes of happiness, would only tend to make them more miserable. Bet-

ter is it to concentrate the whole of our endeavors, that we may travel with some dignity, and with some reputation, down that road which leads from the morning of youth to the night of the grave.

OF THE IMPORTANCE OF LITERATURE, AS IT CONCERNS  
AND IS CONNECTED WITH VIRTUE.

Perfect virtue is the ideal *beautiful* of the moral world : and there is some similitude and affinity between the impression which virtue makes upon us, and that sentiment which is inspired by whatever is sublime, either amidst the productions of the finer arts or in the aspect of the physical world. The regular and graceful proportions of antique statues, the calm and pure expression of certain paintings, the harmony of music, the amenity of a beautiful prospect over a fruitful country, transport us with an enthusiasm by no means uncongenial to that admiration to which we are raised by the contemplation of generous and heroic actions. Fantastic appearances, whether the result of nature or of art, may strike the imagination with a momentary surprise ; but the operations of thought can dwell only upon order and regularity.

In endeavoring to convey some idea of a future life, it has been said that the soul of man returned into the bosom of his creator. This was describing in some measure the emotion we feel, when, after being long bewildered in the labyrinth of the passions, we suddenly hear the august and awful voice of virtue, of pride, or of pity, and when our whole soul becomes alive to the call.

Literature can only derive its permanent beauties from the most delicate and refined morality. Men may devote their actions to vice ; but vice can never control their judgment. Never was it in the power of any poet, however ardent his fancy or vivid his imagination, to draw forth a tragic effect from an incident which admitted the smallest tendency to an immoral principle. Opinion, which fluctuates so much respecting the events of real life, assumes a character of constancy and decision, when it has to pronounce on the productions of the imagination. Literary criticism is not unfrequently, indeed, a sort of treatise on morality. By yielding merely to the impulse and guidance of their talents, eminent writers might discover every thing that is heroic in self-devotion, and all that is affecting in the sacrifices we make of our interests or passions. By studying the art of moving the affections, we explore the recesses and discover the secrets of virtue.

The master-pieces of literature, independent of the fine models which they furnish, produce a kind of moral and physical emotion, an agitating transport of admiration, which excites us to the performance of generous deeds. The legislators of Greece attached no mean importance to the effect that might be produced by music of a martial or a voluptuous strain. Our organs are also acted upon by eloquence, poetry, the incidents of the dramatic scene, and the gloom of melancholy thoughts, though these are properly the objects of reason and reflection : it is then that virtue becomes a voluntary impulse, a movement that communicates itself to the blood, and hurries us irresistibly along like the most violent and imperious passions. It is much to be regretted, that the works which appear in our days, do not more frequently kindle that noble enthusiasm : our taste is, doubtless, formed by the study of the already received and acknowledged master-pieces of literature : but we become accustomed to them from our infancy : each of us is struck with their beauties at different periods of life, and separately receives the impressions they should produce. Were we to assist together in *crowds* at the first representation of a tragedy worthy of *Racine*,—were we to read together the enchanting

pages of Rousseau, or have our ears saluted, for the first time, with the modulated periods of Cicero,—the interest excited by surprise and curiosity would rivet our attention upon truths that are now unheeded ; and genius, assuming its empire over every mind, would repay to morality something of what it has received from morality : it would re-establish that homage to which it owes its inspiration.

The connexion that exists between all the faculties of man is such, that, even by improving his literary taste, you contribute to raise and dignify his character. We experience, within ourselves, a certain impression from the language which we use : the images it calls up in our minds, contribute to the better modification of our dispositions. Thus, when hesitating between different expressions, the writer or the orator gives a decided preference to that which suggests the most pure and delicate idea ; his taste chooses between these expressions, in the same manner as his mind ought to determine respecting the actions of life ; and the former habit often may conduce to the latter.

The sentiment of the intellectual *beautiful*, while it is employed upon literary objects, must inspire a repugnance for every thing mean or ferocious : and this involuntary aversion is as sure a guide as the most fixed and deeply meditated principles.

It would be humiliating to attempt the justification of wit ; its advantages are so evident at the very first glance. Though some persons, by a sort of abuse of wit, have amused themselves by attempting to discover its disadvantages : but this is a paradox to which nothing but puns or equivocal expressions could have lent the appearance of reason. True genuine wit is no other than the faculty of seeing rightly : common sense approaches much nearer to it than false ideas. The more a man is endued with common sense, the more wit he possesses. And genius, what is it, but good sense intent upon new ideas ? Genius augments the treasure of good sense ; it adds its conquests to the dominions of reason. What it explores and discovers to-day, will soon be generally known ; because important truths, when once discovered, strike every mind with equal force. Sophisms, conceits that are called *ingenious*, though they be devoid of justness, in a word, every thing that diverges from the proper point, should invariably be regarded as a defect. But when wit and genius concur, in all their relations, with the dictates of reason, they are equally incapable of producing any evil. When wit and genius, therefore, are encouraged by a nation ; when those only who are gifted with these faculties are promoted to public stations, the surest means are employed to make the cause of morality prosper.

Not unfrequently do we hear imputed to wit the very faults that proceed from the absence of it. Your half-hints, the mere shadows of ideas, darken the mind instead of enlightening it. Virtue is both an affection of the soul, and a demonstrable truth : it must be either felt or understood. If you derive from reasoning only what misleads instinct, without attaining to that which can supply its place ; then it is not the qualities you possess that become destructive, but rather those in which you are deficient. Of all human calamities the remedy should be looked for from above. If we raise our eyes towards heaven, our thoughts swell into a nobler nature : it is by soaring aloft that we breathe a purer air, and are cheered by a brighter light. Man should, in fine, be prompted to aspire to every kind of perfection and superiority : nothing can more contribute to improve and refine his morals. Superior talents excite an admiration, and win an affection, which disposes the mind of those who possess them to gentleness and lenity. Observe men of cruel dispositions ; you will generally find they are deficient in intellectual endowments of the higher order : nature even seems to have given them a cast of countenance that disgusts and re-

pels; and they would fain avenge themselves upon the social order for what nature has refused them. I would without the smallest fear or suspicion confide in those whom I find satisfied with their lot, and who, by some talent or other, can claim and do really merit the suffrage of mankind. But for the man who is incapable of obtaining from his fellow-men any pledge of voluntary approbation, what interest can he feel in the conservation of the human race! To him whom the world admires, the happiness of the world must be dear.

It has frequently been remarked, that historians, dramatic writers, all those, in short, who study men with a view to a description of their character, become themselves indifferent to virtue or to vice. An ordinary knowledge of mankind may, indeed, produce such an effect: but a deeper and more discerning knowledge leads to the very opposite result. He who draws mankind like Saint Simon or Duclos, only contributes to the levity of their opinions and of their morals: but the writer who can observe and appreciate mankind like Tacitus, must, of necessity, be useful to the age he lives in. The art of distinguishing characters, of unfolding their motives, and of drawing forth their discriminative colors, is armed with such a power and ascendancy over opinion, that, in every country where the liberty of the press prevails, no public man, no man of consequence enough to be known, could withstand contempt, if it was inflicted on him by the hand of genius. With what fine bursts of indignation has the aspect of crime filled the mouth of eloquence! How powerfully and triumphantly does eloquence assert and avenge the cause of every generous sentiment! Nothing can equal the impression that is made by an animating strain of eloquence, or the portrait of a character boldly drawn. Pictures of vice leave an indelible impression, when they are the product of a writer of penetration: he analyzes the most secret sentiments and seizes the almost imperceptible shades and details of character; and frequently some energetic expression attaches to a bad man through life, and the man and the expression are but one and the same in the judgment of the public. Here, then, is another moral utility resulting from literary talent, which, by the very art of depicting\* bad actions, brands them with an indelible stigma.

I have now to touch upon the objections that have been urged against those works, in which genius is employed in portraying reprehensible morals. It must indeed be confessed, that such writings are of a tendency to injure morality, if they could leave any deep impression: but the merely superficial marks they make are easily effaced by the influence of genuine and generous sentiments. Susceptibility is, with regard to love, what esteem is with respect to virtue: and as immorality can never gain esteem, so the tear of tenderness will never be shed but at the call of delicacy. Sprightly and amorous writings, in general, serve only as a transient relaxation of the mind, which rarely retains any recollection of them. Human nature is of a serious cast; and, in the silence of meditation, we attach ourselves solely to those works which are calculated to exercise our reason or our own sensibility. It is in this kind of writing only that literary glory has been acquired, and in it alone can the real influence of literature be displayed.

Will it be said, that the pursuit of literary fame may divert a man from the performance of domestic duties,

\* Most undoubtedly, the advantages that might be hoped for from the publicity of truth, may be counterbalanced by the repulsive libels with which France has been dishonored. But I merely intended speaking of the services that might be expected from genius; for genius dreads to disgrace itself by falsehood; it equally dreads confounding characters, as it would then forfeit the rank which it holds among mankind. In all the affairs of men, superiority alone encourages and secures; and what is most to be apprehended are the vices and defects that are inseparable from littleness of mind and poverty of spirit.

or of political services which he might render to his country! There no longer exist any models of those republics, which allotted to each citizen his share of influence over the destiny of his country; much farther are we removed from that patriarchal mode of life, in which every family entertained in their own bosom such sentiments as they most approved. But in the present state of Europe, the progress of literature must tend to unfold every species of generous notions. Were this advancement of literature to be checked, it would not be the cultivation of public virtues or of private affections that would be substituted in its room, but the greedy calculations of selfishness or of vanity.

The generality of mankind, dismayed by the frightful vicissitudes to which political events have given rise amongst us, seem to have lost all regard for the improvement of their minds, and are too deeply intimidated by the hazardous state of things, to allow the intellectual faculties to possess any ascendancy. If the French, however, were to exert themselves to obtain fresh successes in the career of literature and philosophy, it would be a first step made towards the improvement of their morals: the very pleasure that is produced by the success of self-love, would be the means of forming some bands of unity betwixt men. We should gradually emerge from that most degraded state of public spirit, where the selfishness of the state of nature is combined with the active multiplicity of the interests of society: where corruption is without politeness, and coarseness without candor; where civilization is unaccompanied by knowledge, and ignorance unprompted by enthusiasm: in a word, we should emerge from that kind of apathy, the distemper of a few superior men, with which little minds imagine themselves to be attacked; while wholly taken up with their own interest, they betray a total indifference for the suffering of the others.

#### OF LITERATURE, AS IT CONCERNS AND IS CONNECTED WITH GLORY.

If it be true, that literature can essentially contribute to the improvement of morals, it must, by that circumstance alone, have a powerful influence upon glory: for there can be no durable glory enjoyed by a country, in which due regard is not paid to the public morals. If a nation did not adopt certain invariable principles as the basis of its opinion, and if each individual were not strengthened and confirmed in his judgment by a conviction that that judgment was consentaneous to the universal assent, distinguished reputations would be nothing more than so many contingencies that succeeded each other by chance. The splendor of certain actions might dazzle and strike; but there must be a progression in the sentiments we feel, before we arrive at the sublimest of all,—admiration. All our judgments are formed upon comparison. Esteem, approbation, and respect, are so many ingredients that are necessary to the composition of enthusiasm. Morality lays the foundations upon which glory may raise its superstructure; and literature, independently of its alliance and connexion with morals, contributes moreover, and in a manner still more direct, to the production and existence of that glory which is the noblest motive and highest incentive to all public virtues.

The love of one's country is an affection purely social. Man, whom nature has adapted for domestic intercourse, would not carry his ambition farther, if not urged by the irresistible attraction of general esteem: and upon that esteem, which grows out of the public opinion, literary talents exert the most powerful influence. At Athens, at Rome, in all the mistress cities of the civilized world, the powers of eloquence

displayed in public harangues turned at will the inclinations of the people, and decided the general lot. In modern days, reading paves the way for great events, and by this men's minds are enlightened. What would become of populous nations, if the individuals who compose them did not communicate with each other by means of the press? Were silence to prevail in large assemblies of men, there never could be established any point of contact from which to elicit light, and the multitude could never enrich their minds with the thoughts of superior intellects.

As the human species is constantly recruiting itself, an individual can create a void only in opinion; and in order to give existence to that opinion, there must be some means of understanding each other at a distance, and of uniting themselves in one universal sentiment, from a knowledge of the ideas and sentiments that are generally approved. Poets and moralists previously characterize the nature of glorious deeds. The study of literature enables a nation to reward its great men, by teaching it to appreciate their respective deserts. Military glory has existed among the most barbarous tribes; but no comparison should ever be instituted between ignorance and degradation. Should a people that have once been civilized by the love of letters, relapse into a state of indifference to genius and philosophy, and become dull and cold to every lively and generous sentiment; they then can only be distinguished by a spirit that endeavors to debase and vilify, and which prompts them under every circumstance to shut their minds against admiration. They are afraid of being deceived, should they attempt to bestow praise, and, like young fops who assume the air and tone of fashion, they imagine they distinguish themselves more by an unjust censure, than by too great a facility, to commend. Such a people, under such circumstances, generally sink into apathy and indifference; the frost of age seems to have benumbed their rational faculties: they have a sufficient knowledge of things to guard them against surprise, but not enough to qualify them for discriminating what deserves esteem. They may have destroyed a number of illusions, but have not established a single truth; through old age, they have relapsed into infancy: and through reasoning, into uncertainty: they have become strangers to the glow of mutual interest, and have sunk into that state which DANTE calls the *hell of the luke-warm*. Whoever aims at distinction, is sure immediately to raise an unfavorable prejudice against himself; the public is wearied, and sickens at the first appearance of a man who attempts to win any mark of its favor.

When a nation is daily acquiring new lights, it looks with fondness on great men as its precursors in the career which it has to run; but when a nation is conscious that it retrogrades, the small number of superior minds that escape from the general degeneracy, appear, as it were, enriched with its spoils. It no longer takes a common interest in their successes; and the only emotions it feels are those that are prompted by envy.

The dissemination of knowledge, and the illumination that has been produced in Europe by the destruction of slavery and the discovery of printing, must lead to an unlimited melioration of things, or to a complete degradation of society. If the analyzing search of the philosopher ascended to the true principle of social institutions, it would add a new degree of strength to the truths it may have preserved; but that superficial analysis which decomposes only the first obvious ideas, without penetrating into the examination of the whole object, must infallibly tend to weaken and relax the spring of all bold opinions. Amidst a nation whose appetites are palled, whose energies are unstrung, the sentiment of an high admiration cannot possibly be found: even the éclat of military triumphs must fail to acquire an immortal reputation, if the culture of literature

feeling, and for justly appreciating the glory of heroism.

It is by no means true that a great man rises to greater eminence by being the only celebrated person, than when he is surrounded by a number of distinguished names that yield to the first of all,—his own. It has been a maxim in politics, that the kingly power cannot support itself without a peerage and a nobility. Opinion, indeed, will not suffice: there must be added certain gradations of rank in order to secure supremacy. But what was a conqueror, who during the night of ignorance, led barbarians against barbarians? Is Cæsar so celebrated in history for no other reason than that he decided the fate of Rome, while Rome had her Ciceros, her Sallusts, her Catos, and because that bright host of talents and of virtues bent beneath the sword of a single man? Behind Alexander you still discover the shade of Greece. It is necessary, then, for the glory of illustrious warriors, that they subjugate countries that are enriched with all the endowments of the human mind. I do not pretend to say, that the mental powers may one day free the world from the scourge of war; but till then, it is mind, it is eloquence, imagination, and even philosophy, which alone can give grace and relief to the achievement of martial exploits. After every thing else has faded away, and sunk into degradation, force may still bear away over the world; but it will be surrounded by no real or genuine splendor: mankind would be a thousand times more degraded by the extinction of all emulation, than by all the rageful jealousies of which glory was still the object.

#### OF LITERATURE AS IT RELATES TO LIBERTY.

Liberty, virtue, glory, knowledge, those kindred and closely allied ideas which form the proud retinue that attends on the natural dignity of man, cannot possibly be insulated in a separate state of existence; the perfection of each of them results from the union of them all.

Those minds which indulge in the idea, that the destiny of man is connected with the divine intelligence, behold in this comprehension of beings, in this intimate relation between every thing that is good, a strong additional proof of that moral unity, of that unity of conception which informs and directs the universe.

The advancement of literature, that is to say, the ulterior perfection of the art of thinking and of expressing one's thoughts, is necessary to the establishment and to the conservation of liberty. It is manifest, that the light of knowledge is the more indispensably necessary in a country, as all the citizens who inhabit it have a more immediate influence on the character and conduct of the government: and equally true is it, that political equality, a principle essentially inherent in every philosophical institution, cannot possibly exist, unless you class the differences of education with as minute an attention as was exerted, in feudal times, to maintain arbitrary distinctions. Purity of language, dignity of expression, that bespeak and picture out the nobleness of the soul, are more eminently necessary in a state that is bottomed on a democratical basis. Elsewhere, certain factitious barriers prevent the total confusion of different educations: but when power is only to be supported and upheld by the supposition of personal merit, what care should be taken to surround that merit with all the splendor of its external characteristics!

In a democratic state, it is continually to be feared that the love of popularity may beget an imitation of vulgar manners: soon then would a persuasion be entertained that it was useless, nay, perhaps prejudicial to hold out a too strongly marked superiority over

multitude, whose favor a man may be prompted to wish to conciliate for the purpose of gratifying his ambition. The people would thence become accustomed to make choice of ignorant and illiberal magistrates : such magistrates would soon put out every light of knowledge ; and, by an inevitable consequence, the extinction of knowledge would bring back the degradation and slavery of the people.

It is impossible that, in a free state, the public authority can stand without the genuine, unbiassed assent of the citizens whom it governs. Reasoning and eloquence are the natural bonds that hold together a republican association. What power can you wield over the free will of men, if you be destitute of that vigour, that truth of expression, which penetrates into every soul, and inspires the very sentiments it expresses ? If persons who are called to the helm of the commonwealth, do not possess the secret of persuading men's minds, the nation ceases to acquire lights, and individuals adhere to the opinion upon public affairs which chance has implanted in their understanding. Were eloquence to die away, one of the principal motives for regretting its extinction would be, that its loss would tend to insulate mankind from each other, by resigning them wholly and solely to their individual impressions. Those who cannot convince, must oppress ; and in all the different relations between the governing and the governed, the fewer qualities the former possess the more will be their encroachments on the latter.

The establishment of new institutions must create a new spirit in countries that aspire to be free. But what hold can be laid upon opinion without the aid and concurrence of able writers ? In order to call forth such a spirit, it is not obedience that you are to enforce, but the desire of new institutions that you must suggest : and when a government is wisely inclined to promote the establishment of these institutions ; so tender should be the regard shown to public opinion, that government should only seem to anticipate the public wish. There is nothing but the sound writings of accomplished wits that, for any length of time, can direct and modify the bent of certain national habitudes. Man, in the secret recesses of his soul, secures an asylum for liberty, inaccessible to the attacks of force ; conquerors have often adopted the manners of the conquered ; but conviction alone has been able to change ancient customs. The cultivation and improvement of literature are the best means by which you can effectually combat the obstinacy of inveterate prejudices. In countries newly become free, in order to extirpate old deep-rooted errors, governments must employ ridicule, to give youth a disrelish to them ; and conviction, to obliterate them from maturer minds. In order to favor the foundation of new establishments, governments must stimulate hope, excite curiosity, kindle enthusiasm ; call forth, in a word, those sentiments of creative energy that have given birth to every thing that exists and stability to every thing that endures ; and by what powers can these sentiments be inspired, but by the art of eloquence and of fine composition ? The love of activity so necessary in all free states, breaks out in a spirit of faction, unless the acquirement and diffusion of knowledge be an object of universal interest, and be formed into an occupation that opens impartially to every talent a field in which the general ambition may be exercised and displayed. It will also be necessary to encourage a close and constant study of history and philosophy, which alone can qualify the mind to penetrate into and disseminate the knowledge of the respective rights and duties of nations, and of the magistrates who rule them. In despotic empires, reason can only be of avail to induce the resignation of individuals ; but in free countries, it must watch over the general tranquillity and protect the general freedom

Among the various studies which tend to develop the human mind, it is philosophical literature, it is eloquence and reasoning, which I look upon as the chief stay and most permanent pledge of liberty. The sciences and the arts constitute a very important portion of our intellectual labours ; but the discoveries to which they lead, and the success with which they are crowned, exert no immediate influence upon that public opinion on which hangs the destiny of nations. Geometricians, natural philosophers, painters, and poets, may meet with protection and encouragement under the reign of the most potent monarchs : but before the eyes of such masters, political and religious philosophy would rise up in the shape of the most formidable insurrection.

Those who devote themselves to the study of the abstract sciences ; as they have not to encounter, in their progress, the passions of mankind : so they gradually get accustomed to take that only into account, which is susceptible of mathematical demonstration : they almost invariably arrange in the class of delusions whatever they are unable to submit to the logic of calculation. The strength of government, no matter what its form may be, is the first thing they attend to and appreciate : and as they have scarcely any other desire than that of prosecuting unmoled the plan of their learned labours, they easily yield obedience to the ruling authority. The profound meditation so requisite in the combinations of the abstract sciences, weans the attention of the learned from the ordinary events of life ; and nothing so wonderfully suits the views and temper of absolute monarchs, as a description of men who are so wholly engrossed with contemplating the physical laws of the world, that they readily abandon the care of its moral order to any one who will take the trouble of directing it. It may indeed be true, that discoveries made in sciences will, in process of time, give a new spring and energy to that higher species of philosophy that sits in judgment on nations and on kings ; but a futurity so remote can have nothing in it to restrain and intimidate the audacity of tyrants. We have seen many tyrants who were ostentatious in their protection of the sciences and the arts : but all of them have dreaded the natural enemies of protection itself,—men who think and philosophize.

Poetry, of all the arts, is that which borders most closely on the province of reasoning. Poetry, however, admits neither analysis nor discussion ; which are both so conducive to the discovery and dissemination of philosophical ideas. The mind that is anxious to utter any bold and novel truth, would preferably express itself in a style of language that conveys its thoughts with exactness and precision : it would labour more after the ascendancy of conviction than the colorings of the imagination. Poetry has more frequently been employed in flattering, than in censuring power ; and, in general, the fine arts may sometimes contribute, through the very enjoyments they procure, to fashion men to that mould in which tyrants would wish them to be cast. By the endless variety of pleasures which they daily hold out to enjoyment, the arts have a power to divert the mind from cherishing any predominant idea : they enlist men on the side of their sensations : they breathe into the soul a kind of voluptuous philosophy, a deliberate unconcernedness, a passion for the present, an indifference for the future ; than which nothing can be more favorable to tyranny. By a singular contrast, the arts, while they give a taste and relish for life, render us rather dull and indifferent to death. The passions alone make us cling forcibly to existence, by the ardent wish they inspire for the accomplishment of their object : but a life devoted to mere amusements, diverts without captivating ; and disposes to intoxication, to sleep, and to death. During those periods which sanguinary proscriptions have consigned to infamy, the Romans and the French in

with extraordinary eagerness in all kinds of public amusements: but in well-constituted republics, grave occupations, domestic affections, the love and pursuit of glory, not unfrequently alienate the mind even from the enjoyments furnished by the fine arts. Indeed, the only literary engine that can be wielded with effect, so as to make all injurious powers tremble, even in the most elevated sphere, is manly eloquence, independent philosophy; which, and which alone, can arraign before the tribunal of reason all the opinions and institutions of mankind.

From an undue influence of a military spirit there also results very imminent danger to free states: nor can this danger be averted, but by diffusing the light of knowledge and the spirit of philosophy. If military men pretend to look down with disdain on men of letters, it is because the latter do not always unite with talents a sufficient decision and vigor of character. But the art of composition might also become a weapon, and eloquence might quicken into action, if it displayed the living energies of the soul;—if the sentiments of the writer soared to the elevation of his thoughts;—and if tyranny beheld itself exposed to the attacks of the most formidable of its foes, stern reason and generous indignation. Consideration would then no longer be exclusively attached to military talents, nor would liberty run the risk to which it must otherwise be necessarily exposed.

From among the troops that compose an army, every thing like opinion is banished by the severity of its discipline. So far this *esprit de corps* bears some resemblance to that which prevails among the priesthood: it in like manner excludes all reasoning and discussion, and admits no other guide or rule but the will of superiors. The constant, uninterrupted exercise of the omnipotence of arms must, in the end, inspire nothing but contempt for the slow and silent progress of persuasion.

The enthusiastic admiration which waits on the glory of triumphant generals, is wholly unconnected with the justice of the cause they espouse. The imagination is struck only with the decision of fortune in their favor, and the splendor of success which crowns their intrepidity. The enemies of liberty, it is true, may be overpowered in battle: but, in order to make the principles of that liberty take root and flourish in a country, the military spirit must be done away; thought and reasoning must be called in, and these seconded by the warrior's qualities of courage, ardour, and decision, in order to excite in the souls of its inhabitants something spontaneous, something voluntary, which dies away within them when they have been long inured to the triumphant prevalence of mere force.

In all ages and in all countries, a military spirit produces the same effects: it stamps no nation with any peculiar character; it weds no people to any particular institution: it is, indeed, calculated equally to defend and protect them all. Eloquence and philosophy can alone give the charms and endearments of country to any extent of territory, by framing the nation that inhabits it to a similarity of propensities and habits, of customs and sentiments. Force dispenses with the aid of time, and tramples down will; but by this very means it is rendered unfit for giving permanency to any thing among men. During the course of the French revolution, we have often heard it said, 'that a certain degree of despotism was necessary to the establishment of liberty.' This incongruous jumble of words passed into a kind of sentence: but that sentence can make no change in the real nature of things. Institutions established by force may, indeed, wear all the features and appearances of liberty, except its natural motion: they may exhibit all its forms, and shock you by the resemblance;—like those models that retain every thing that constitutes a likeness, but life.

#### OF LITERATURE, AS IT IS CONNECTED WITH HAPPINESS.

Every idea of happiness has been almost lost sight of amidst the very efforts that seemed at first to have been made for its attainment; and a sordid selfishness, by depriving each individual of the support and co-operation of others, has considerably diminished that portion of public happiness which the constitution of the social order had so fairly promised. In vain might hearts of sensibility endeavor to diffuse around them their expansive benevolence; insurmountable obstacles would obstruct and frustrate their generous intentions; they would be censured even by public opinion, which is ready enough to condemn those who would fain deviate from that sphere of self-love, which every one seems anxious to secure as an inviolable asylum. A man must, therefore, exist for himself alone, since a reciprocity of affection is no where to be found, and since it is even forbidden to assuage sorrow or alleviate distress. He must exist for himself alone, in order to preserve in his imagination the model of every thing that is sublime or beautiful; or to keep alive the sacred fire of genuine enthusiasm, and retain the image of virtue, such as in the freedom of meditation she always appears, and such as she has been portrayed by those exalted minds that have been the ornaments of every age.

What form of character would mankind assume, if they were never to hear the language of honest and generous sentiments;—if hearts of sensibility were condemned to live among frigid egotists;—if unbiassed reason was to be waging an ineffectual struggle against the sophistries of vice; and if the tender solitudes of pity were incessantly exposed to the scorn and mockeries of unfeeling frivolity? In the end, perhaps, we should arrive at the total extinction even of self-esteem. Man finds himself necessitated to rely on the opinion of his fellow-man: he dreads lest his self-love should be taken for his conscience: he accuses himself of folly, if he sees nothing around him that bears any resemblance to himself: and such is the imbecility of human nature, such its dependence upon society, that man would, in some measure, repent of his good qualities, as of involuntary defects, if general opinion concurred in censuring them: but, in these moments of disquietude, he has recourse to his books; and they hold up to him the undisfigured monuments of those refined and noble sentiments that have exalted every age. If liberty be dear to him; if the name of republic, so powerful over the feelings of proud unbending minds, associate in his reflections with the image of all the virtues;—some of Plutarch's Lives; a letter from Brutus to Cicero; a few sentences of Cato, in the language of Addison; some of those reflections with which the hatred of tyranny inspired Tacitus; or, those sentiments, real or supposed, which historians and poets put into the mouths of their heroes; are sufficient to raise anew the soul after it has shrunk and sickened at the aspect of contemporary events. An exalted character is restored to self-approbation, if he finds his soul in union with these noble sentiments, and with those lofty virtues which imagination selects and embodies when she aspires to delineate a model for the imitation of every age. How abundant are the consolations which we derive from writings of a certain cast! If the great men of early antiquity were exposed, during their lives, to the shafts of calumny; their only retreat and asylum lay within their own breasts: but, in our days, we may have recourse to the Phædon of Socrates, to the animating master-pieces of eloquence that support the mind under the pressure of adversity. The philosophers of every country exhort and encourage us; and the persuasive language of morality drawn from an intimate knowledge of the human heart, seems to be addressed individually to all those whom it consoles. How useful, how congenial is it to human nature, to

attach an high importance to the influence of reason and of literature ! The type and form of what is virtuous and just, can no longer be destroyed. The man whom nature destines for virtue, can no longer want a guide : and, finally, (what is of infinite consequence,) grief may be sure always to meet a healing sympathy and condolence. From that arid sadness which we feel when abandoned and forlorn, from that icy hand with which misfortunes presses on us when we imagine ourselves to be deserted by pity and compassion, we are rescued in some measure by those writings that still bear the breathing impression of noble thoughts and virtuous affections. Such writings draw forth tears in every situation of life : they raise the mind to general meditations, which divert our attention from personal sufferings : they create a society for us, and a communion both with dead and living authors, and with all those who concur in admiring the works which we approve. In the desolation of exile, amidst the gloom of dungeons, at the approach of danger and of death, a particular passage of an affecting author may have often re-animated a prostrate soul : even I, who read, who now touch that page, methinks I discover on it the track of tears ; and by indulging in similar emotions, I enter into a kind of intercourse and fellowship with those whose cruel destiny I so deeply deplore. Amidst the calm of ease, the sunshine of happiness, life is an easy labour : but in the gloominess of misfortune, it is difficult to conceive how strongly certain reflections and sentiments, that have sunk deeply into the heart, mark their era in the history of our solitary impressions. Grief can only be assuaged by the power of weeping over our destiny, and of taking that interest in what concerns ourselves, so as to divide us in some sort into two separate beings, the one of whom commiserates the other. But this resource, in misfortune, can only be enjoyed by a virtuous man. When adversity assails the vicious and the profligate, they have no retreat left them in their own reflections : as long as their criminal habits consign their soul to ferociousness and aridity, and until a sincere repentance re-establishes them in a moral disposition, their sufferings must be poignant and excruciating : the dark recesses of such minds can never admit even a gleam of consolation. The unfortunate man, who, by the malignant misrepresentations and aspersions of artful calumny, finds himself suddenly robbed of his reputation, and exposed to general censure and contempt, would likewise sink into the situation of the really guilty, were he not able to derive some comfort and encouragement from those writings, which might enable him to behold himself in his true colours ; to confide in those who resemble him, and harbour the conviction, that in some corners of the world there exist persons who would sympathize with him in his downfall, and affectionately weep with him, could he but submit his case to their consideration and compassion.

How precious, therefore, are these ever-living lines, which supply to us the place of friends, of public esteem, of country ! In an age like the present, when such accumulated calamities have visited the human race, how desirable is it that there should exist a writer, who, with a taste turned to such pursuits, would select and treasure up all those care-soothing reflections, all those efforts exerted by reason, that have contributed to salace the unfortunate in their miserable career ! Such a work at least would open an abundant source of tears.

The voyager, whom a storm has cast on an unpeopled shore, engraves upon the surrounding rocks the names of the aliments he has discovered, and points out to those who may be involved in a similar fate, the resources which he employed against danger and death.

*We, whom the chances of this mortal life have reserved for a period of revolution, should also make it our business to transmit to future generations an intimate*

knowledge of those secrets of the soul, of those unexpected consolations which parent nature has employed to smooth our way through the rugged paths of life.

## PLAN OF THE WORK.

After having collected some general ideas which ascertain the power exerted by literature over the destiny of man ; I shall now proceed to develop them by a successive survey of those more enlightened periods that shine so conspicuously in the history of letters.

The first part of this work will contain a moral and philosophical analysis of Grecian and Latin literature : some reflections on the effects produced upon the human mind by the invasions of the northern nations, by the revival of letters, and by the establishment of the Christian religion ; a rapid delineation of the discriminative traits of modern literature, with some more detailed observations on the master-pieces in Italian, English, German, and French languages, considered agreeably to the general scope of the work, that is to say, with a view to the relations that subsist between the political state of a country and the predominant spirit of its literature. I will endeavor to show the particular character which eloquence assumes under this or that form of government ; the moral ideas which this or that religious creed is calculated to beget in the human mind ; the effects of imagination that are produced by the credulity of the people ; the poetical beauties that depend upon the influence of climate the degree of civilization that best promotes the strength and perfection of literature ; the various changes that have been introduced into the art of composition, as well as into manners, by the different modes of existence of women before and after the establishment of the Christian religion ; and, finally, the universal progress of knowledge resulting for the mere succession of ages. These considerations will form the subject-matter of the first part.

In the second, I will examine into the state of knowledge and of literature in France since the revolution ; and I will hazard a few conjectures respecting what ought to be, and what certainly will be, their future state, if we ate one day to enjoy the possession of republican freedom and morality. In order to attain to some knowledge respecting the unknown events which time has not yet developed, I shall avail myself of an analogical deduction from past events : and then, by restating the observations I shall have made in the first part of this work, respecting the influence of a particular religion, a form of government, or particular manners and customs, I shall be enabled to draw some inferences relative to my supposed future state of things. In this second part will be exhibited, at one view, both our present degradation and our future attainable perfection. This subject must sometimes lead me to observations on the political situation of France during the last ten years : but I shall touch on it only as far as it is connected with literature and philosophy, without diverging into any digression foreign to my general purpose.

As I survey the revolutions of the globe, and the succession of ages, one great idea is ever uppermost in my mind, from which I never allow my attention to be diverted ; I mean that of the perfectibility of the human race. I cannot bring myself to think, that this grand work of moral nature has ever been abandoned ; in the ages of light, as well as in those of darkness, the gradual advancement of the human intellect has never been interrupted.

This system of the perfectibility of human nature has, it is true, become odious in the eyes of some persons, on account of the atrocious consequences derived from it at certain disastrous periods of the revolution : nothing, however, has less connection with these consequences

than that exalted system. As nature sometimes makes partial evils tend to the general good, a set of beaotted barbarians imagined themselves transformed into supreme legislators, while they drew down upon the human race a train of calamities, the effects of which they vainly expected to direct; but which were in the end productive of nothing but misery and ruin. Philosophy may occasionally look back upon past calamities, and contemplate them as salutary lessons, and as instruments and means of reparation in the hand of time; but this observation can never sanction, under any circumstances whatever, the slightest departure from the positive laws of justice. As the human mind can never arrive at a certain knowledge of futurity, virtue alone should prompt its divinations. The consequences, whatever they may be, of human actions, can never contribute to render them either innocent or criminal: man is to be guided, not by fanciful and arbitrary rules, but by fixed unalterable duties; and experience itself has proved, that we fail in attaining the moral end we have in view, when guilty means are employed for its attainment. Because men of sanguinary minds have polluted and profaned the language of generous and noble feelings; does it follow that we are to be forbidden to let our breasts expand at the recollection of sublime sentiments and thoughts? The ruffian might thus tear from the man of virtue the dearest objects of his esteem: for it is ever under the name of some virtue that political crimes are perpetrated.

No, never can man's reason be detached from those ideas that hold out the promise of so many fortunate results. And, indeed, into what dejection must the human mind fall, were it no longer to be cheered with the hope that every day must add to the mass of knowledge,—that every day must more fully unfold the truths of philosophy! Persecutions, calumnies, sufferings of every hue, would become the lamentable lot of those who boldly think and soundly moralize. The votaries of ambition and avarice at one time endeavor to deride as fallacious the warnings of conscience; at another, they would insinuate that unworthy motives are the spring of generous actions. To such men it is intolerable, that any thing like morality should exist; and they persecute it with revengeful zeal, even to the very heart in which it attempts to take refuge.

Envy is still attracted by that luminous ray which beams around the head of the moral man. This lustre, which the foul breath of their calumnies sometimes succeeds in eclipsing and concealing from the eyes of the world, never ceases to dazzle and dim their own. What then must be the fate of the worthy man whom so many enemies worry and persecute, if his misery were accomplished by their success in depriving him of the most consolatory and religious hope, which earthly existence can enjoy—that of the future improvement and perfection of his fellow-creatures?

To this philosophical creed do I cling with all the faculties of my mind: I perceive among its chief advantages, that it inspires an high sense of self-esteem, an elevation of soul; and I appeal to every mind of a certain cast, whether there be in this nether world a purer enjoyment than that conferred by this enlargement of mind! To it we are indebted, that there still are moments in which all these mean groveling beings, with all their sordid calculations of self-interestedness, fade away and sink before their eyes. Our faculties are inspired with fresh vigor by contemplating the future state of knowledge, of virtue, and of glory: certain vague impressions crowd in upon us, certain sentiments that we cannot well define, which alleviate the load of life; while the whole moral man swells with the pride of virtue, and swims in the overflows of happiness. If all our efforts were to be exerted in vain; if our intellectual labors were to be employed to no purpose, but irrevocably swallowed up in the oblivious gulf of time; where is the object which a virtuous man could propose to himself in his solitary meditations? For my own part, I have, throughout this work, incessantly adverted to every circumstance that tends to evince the perfectibility of the human species. Nor is this to be confounded with visionary theories; it is the result of observation, and stands on the evidence of facts. It is wise, indeed, to guard against that species of metaphysics which derives no support from experience: but at the same time, it should not be forgotten that, in times of degeneracy and corruption, the name of METAPHYSICS is given to every thing that is not circumscribed within the narrow limits of self-love, or that does not coincide with the calculations of self-interest.



## INFLUENCE OF LITERATURE

UPON

## SOCIETY.

## PART FIRST.

OF THE STATE OF LITERATURE AMONG THE ANCIENTS AND THE MODERNS.

## CHAPTER I.

## THE FIRST ERA OF GRECIAN LITERATURE.

The astonishing success which crowned the literary labours of the Greeks, more especially in poetry, might be urged as an objection against the progressive perfectibility of the human mind. It may be said, that the first writers with whom we are acquainted, and particularly the first poet, have not been surpassed during a period of nearly three thousand years; and even that the successors and imitators of the Greeks have frequently fallen very far short of the perfection of their models.

Under the denomination of literature, I have comprehended poetry, eloquence, history, and philosophy, or the study of man as a moral agent. In tracing these different branches of literature, it may be proper to distinguish what appertains to the imagination from that which is the result of thought. It will likewise be necessary to investigate to what degree both these faculties are susceptible of perfection: we shall thence be able to ascertain the principal cause of the superiority of the Greeks in the cultivation of the fine arts; and we shall farther be helped to discern, whether their philosophical acquirements exceeded what the age they lived in, what their form of government, and what their state of civilization, might have led us to expect. It is very obvious, that some certain limit may be fixed to the progress of the arts; though the discoveries of a thinking mind are without a bound. Now, in moral nature, as soon as some end appears in view, the road that leads to it is speedily travelled over: but where a career is boundless, our progress must always appear slow. This observation, I think, may apply to a variety of other objects besides those that more particularly relate to the cultivation of literature. The fine arts are not susceptible of infinite perfection: thus we observe, that the imagination which gave them birth, is far more brilliant in its first impressions than in its fairest and most felicitous recollections.

Modern poetry consists in images and sentiments. *When viewed as consisting of imageries, it ranks among the imitations of nature: when looked upon as*

composed of sentiments, it then results from the eloquence of the passions. In poetry, considered in this first view, or in an animated description of external objects, the Greeks excelled, at the earliest period of their literature. In our endeavors to express what we feel, a poetical style is easily adopted, or recourse is had to imagery, in order to give greater strength to our impressions: but poetry, properly so called, is the art of painting by words, every thing that attracts and strikes our eyes, and the connection between sentiments and sensations is the first step towards philosophy. Here, however, we shall consider poetry as far only as it is an imitation of physical nature; and in that view, poetry is not susceptible of an indefinite perfection.

The same means may give rise to new effects, if they are adapted to different languages. But a portrait cannot do more than resemble, and our sensations are still limited by our senses. The description of spring, of a storm, of night, of beauty, of a battle, may be susceptible of infinite variety in the details: but the strongest impressions must have been produced by the first poet who succeeded in painting them. The elements may be combined, but cannot be multiplied. Perfection can only be displayed by the shades and gradations of light: but he who first of all made himself master of the primitive colours, will preserve the merit of invention, and give a brilliancy to his descriptions, which his successors will attempt in vain to emulate.

When the contrasts exhibited by nature, and the remarkable effects which strike alike every beholder, are first introduced into poetry; they present to the imagination the most energetic pictures, and the most marked and simple oppositions. The thoughts that are infused into poetry, produce an happy development of its beauties; but then it is not mere poetry. Aristotle, who first defined the term *poetry*, calls it 'an imitative art.' The powers of reason are daily unfolded, and continually extend themselves to new objects. In this respect, ages become the inheritors of ages: generations start from the point at which preceding generations had stopped; and thinking philosophers form, through the lapse of centuries, a chain of ideas which the hand of death does not interrupt. Not

so with poetry. Poetry, at the first outset, may attain to certain beauties that cannot be afterwards surpassed : whilst, in the progressive sciences, the last step is the most finished of all ; so the power of the imagination is the more prominent, as the exercise of it is the more early and fresh.

The ancients were animated and hurried along by an enthusiastic imagination, the impressions of which they were not in the habit of analyzing by patient meditation. They took possession of a land hitherto unexplored, of a country not yet described. Delighted and surprised with every enjoyment and every production which nature hold out to them, they placed a god over them, to enhance their value, and to secure their duration : their composition was shaped upon no other model than the objects themselves which they were occupied in delineating ; they were guided by no antecedent system of literature. As long as poetical enthusiasm remains ignorant of its own emotions it derives from that circumstance alone a strength and a simplicity which no effort of study can attain ; it is the charm of a first love. But as soon as the paths of literature have become trodden by the feet of other writers ; then their successors in the same track cannot be but conscious that they are portraying sentiments which others had expressed before : they cease to be astonished at what arises in their own minds : they know themselves to be in a phrensy : they judge themselves to be enthusiasts : and consequently, they can no longer indulge the idea of a supernatural inspiration.

With respect to literature, the Greeks may indeed be considered as the first people that ever existed. The Egyptians, who preceded them had undoubtedly attained much proficiency in knowledge ; but the uniformity of the rules to which they adhered, kept them as it were stationary in the field of imagination. The Egyptians certainly did not furnish the Greeks with a model for their poetry ; the poetry of Greece, is incontestably, the first ;\* nor is it at all surprising, that the earliest poetry should, perhaps, be that which best deserves our praise and approbation : for to that circumstance alone does it chiefly owe the superiority it has attained. But this opinion seems to require a farther elucidation.

An attentive examination of the three different eras of Grecian literature, will enable us very distinctly to discover in them the natural progress of the human mind. As far as we are acquainted with the remote periods of Grecian history, we find that the Greeks derived their first celebrity from their poets. Homer stamped the character of his genius on the first epocha of Grecian literature : the age of Pericles was distinguished by a rapid progress in the drama, in eloquence, in morality, and by the first dawns of philosophy. In the time of Alexander, a more profound study of the philosophical sciences became the principal occupation of those who possessed literary talents. It must indeed be acknowledged, that the powers of the human mind require to be unfolded to a certain degree, before it can reach the elevations of poetry ; but it must likewise be confessed, that the range of a poetical fancy must be somewhat checked, when the progress of civilization and of philosophy has rectified all the errors of the imagination.

It has been frequently asserted, that the fine arts and poetry have most flourished in corrupt ages. This is merely saying, that the greater part of free nations have only been employed in the conservation of their morals and of their liberty ; while kings and despotic chiefs have been the voluntary promoters and encouragers of relaxations and amusements. But the origin of poetry,—the poem the most remarkable for the display of

*\* It is supposed, that the poetry of the Hebrews preceded that of Homer ; but it appears that the Greeks were totally unacquainted with it.*

imagination, that of Homer, is the production of an age renowned for the simplicity of its manners. The progress of poetry is neither accelerated nor retarded by national virtue or depravity ; but it is principally indebted to the recent state of nature, and to the infancy of civilization. The tender years of the poet cannot entirely compensate for the juvenile state of the human species : those whose ears can be enraptured by poetic strains, must be great admirers of the scenes of unadorned nature : they must feel flexible to her impressions, and astonished at her prodigies. A more philosophical disposition in an audience, might render them more fastidious and nice ; but it could never contribute to enhance the beauties and charms of verse : it is among men who are easily moved, that inspiration arms the true poet with the most impressive powers.

The origin of societies, the formation of languages, (the first steps towards the progress of the human mind,) are wholly unknown to us ; and, in general, nothing is more wearisome and disgusting than the metaphysical substitution of facts for the sake of supporting a theory, without ever attempting to lay down any positive observation as a fundamental basis. But here a reflection occurs to me, which, as it is necessarily connected with the subject I am treating, I will not omit to state : namely, that moral nature quickly acquires whatever is necessary to the development of itself ; in the same manner as physical nature first discovers whatever is requisite to its own conservation. The creative power has been prodigal of whatever is needful. The productions that nourish our bodies, and the elementary ideas that first form the mind have in a manner, been holden out spontaneously to man. He speedily came to the knowledge and attainment of those things which he felt the absolute necessity : but the advancement that followed the discoveries suggested by this necessity, have, in proportion, been infinitely more slow. It would seem as if man, in the researches necessary to his existence, had been conducted by a divine hand ; which delivered him over to his own guidance, when he entered upon pursuits of a less immediate necessity. The theory of a language, for example the Greek, supposes an infinite variety of combinations far beyond the extent of the metaphysical acquirements of those writers, who, nevertheless, spoke the language with so much purity and perfection :—but language is an instrument indispensably requisite to the attainment of every other additional light ; and that instrument by a kind of prodigy, is to be found at a period when it was not in the power of any man to attain, on any other subject whatsoever, to that degree of mental abstraction which the composition of a grammar necessarily requires. The Greek writers are not to be looked upon as gifted with that depth of thought which the metaphysical niceties of their language might lead us to suppose : they can be considered only as poets ; and, as poets, every thing conspired in their favor.

The events, the characters, the superstitions, and the customs, which marked the complexion of the heroic ages, were peculiarly adapted to the display of poetic imaginary. Homer, great and sublime, as he must undoubtedly be acknowledged, is not a man superior to all other men : nor does he stand alone in the age he lived in ; nor does he rise so far above those who figured many centuries before him. The comprehension of the most exalted genius bears always some proportion to the degree of literary light enjoyed by his contemporaries ; and it may not perhaps be difficult to calculate, how far the intellectual powers of one man may exceed the extent of knowledge, to which the age he lived in had attained. Homer carefully collected all the traditions that were afloat in his days, and the history of the principal events of those days was, in itself, highly poetical. The fewer and more abstracted the

nications between different countries, were at that time, the more the narrative of facts was emblazoned by the imagination. The ruffian robbers and ferocious animal that then infested the earth, gave a higher and more dazzling value to the exploits of heroes, which were found necessary to the individual security of their fellow-citizens. As the tendency of public events had a direct influence upon the destiny and happiness of each person in particular, gratitude and fear conspired to kindle enthusiasm. Heroes and gods were confounded, because they were each looked up to for the same protection; and the splendid achievements of war appeared nothing less than supernatural, to the affrighted senses. Thus the *marvellous* was mixed with the physical as well as with the moral nature. Philosophy, that is to say, the knowledge of causes and their effects, strikes the reflecting mind with admiration, and naturally leads the ideas to the great work of creation; but each part, considered singly, requires a particular description and explanation. When man acquires the faculty of foreseeing, he loses in a great measure, his astonishment; enthusiasm, like fear, is generally the effect of surprise.

Bodily strength was by the ancients holden in the highest veneration; they considered their safety as entirely depending on it. War had not yet become a science; and courage with them was much less a moral than a physical virtue: the feelings of mankind with regard to honor, and respect for the aged and defenceless, were the more exalted ideas of the subsequent ages. The Grecian heroes publicly accused themselves of cowardice: and a beautiful virgin was sacrificed by the son of Achilles in the eyes of all Greece; which, by its applause, declared its approbation of the horrid deed. Poets paint external objects in the most striking point of view; but they cannot draw characters where the moral beauty has been kept up without blemish to the conclusion of the poem or tragedy: the reason is plain; Such characters have no existence in nature. However sublime Homer may be esteemed in the beautiful and regular disposition of events, and the grandeur of his *dramatis persona*; it has often happened that his commentators have been transported with admiration at some of the most common expressions in the language: as if the poet had been the first to discover the sense which was attached to them.

Homer and the other Grecian poets have been holden in high estimation for the variety and splendor of their imagery, but not for the depth of their reflections. The conceptions of a poet should be transmitted in the most lively manner to the imagination of his readers, who, it may be said, must see with his eyes, and commence poets also; they are to journey on with him through immense tracts of space; a rapid succession of events and imagery, more or less agreeable, is ever passing before their eyes; they believe, they admire, they are astonished, and the curiosity of puerile years is united to the turbulent passions of riper years. Homer describes every thing with the greatest minuteness, because every thing at that period interested his contemporaries: he tells you, that '*an island is a piece of land surrounded with water*;' that *corn is the chief support of man*;' and that *at mid-day the sun is vertical*.' It may be said, that Homer is sometimes given to repetitions; but he is never tiresome, because he is continually presenting new ideas: and he never fatigues his readers by abstract reasonings.

Metaphysics (the art of generalizing ideas) has greatly aided the progress of the human mind: but, in so doing, the knowledge acquired has lost much of its brilliancy. All objects presented themselves in succession to the eyes of Homer; who however did not make his choice with rigid accuracy, though he never failed to display them to the greatest advantage.

The Grecian poets, in general, gave themselves little trouble in connecting their ideas, and formed few com-

binations in their writings: they were fond of reciting the praise and adulation they were continually receiving. Such language by repetition created a degree of enthusiasm, which, heightened by the heat of their climate, produced, if the term may be admitted, a poetical delirium, that inspired their natural genius with words. The Italians derive their divine music from the soul-subduing sounds they draw from their own mellifluous organization; thus it is that the harmony of the Grecian language assimilates its poetry to the tones of the lyre; by this means uniting music and poetry as necessary and inseparable companions.

It has been remarked, that those who are really devoted to the science of music, in their admiration of it, seldom, if ever, pay any attention to the words of a fine air; they are more captivated with the undeterminate ideas which superior harmony alone inspires. It is the same with philosophy and poetry; the profound attention exacted by the former, prevents, in a great measure, that which the latter requires: though it certainly does not follow that a poet, in order to indulge his imagination in a favorite pursuit, should renounce forever the more abstruse philosophical ideas he may have acquired: there is little reason to doubt that a mind, sufficiently enlightened to receive perceptions of such a nature, would be continually brought back to a retrospect which could not fail to afford satisfaction: by the force of such reasoning, it would be as impossible for a modern writer to forget what he had acquired, as it would be for him to see and represent objects in the light in which they were seen and represented by the ancients.

Our great writers have united in their poetry all the richness of the language of the present age; but we are indebted to ancient literature for the forms that constitute the art of poetry; because it is impossible, as has been before observed, to pass a certain limit in the arts,—not even in poetry, esteemed one of the first amongst them.

It has been remarked, and with truth, that the greatest purity (except in a few instances that will be explained hereafter in speaking of theatrical productions) reigned throughout the first era of literature: but how could it have been otherwise? It was hardly possible their taste could have been vitiated whilst they were surrounded by new and pleasing objects; it is the want of variety that renders the mind whimsical and fastidious: but the Greeks, with the most beautiful imagery immediately within their view, and endowed with very lively perceptions, gave themselves up to the descriptions of what pleased them most; and their fine taste is owing to their pure and uncorrupted enjoyments of simple nature. Our refined theory, therefore, does nothing more than analyze their impressions.

The Greeks are indebted for their progress in the fine arts chiefly to their pagan religion: their pretended deities, always near to men, yet at the same time always exalted far above them, rendered the beauty and elegance of their paintings a matter of sacred observance: religion also was called to their aid in their master-pieces of literature. The priests and legislators turned the credulity of the people so entirely to poetical fiction, that the oracles, and all the mysteries of the Grecian mythology, appeared to be but the creation of a free and unbiassed imagination. The poets and painters also availed themselves of the general belief, in order to place in the skies the resources and secrets of their art. The habits and customs of the Greeks too gave an elevation to their ideas, and a dignity to their manners: the most ordinary employments of their lives were ennobled by the religious ceremonies which were mixed with them; their repasts were preceded by libations of wine offered on the steps of the doors to render the gods propitious; and they prostrated themselves before Jupiter Hospitalis. The occupations too of agriculture and hunting were much

fashion with the heroes of antiquity : and these pursuits tended greatly to the advantage of poetry, by combining matters of the highest political importance with the simple images of nature.

Slavery, that abominable scourge of the human species, by increasing the power of social distinctions, placed in a still more conspicuous view the grandeur of heroic characters : but the Greeks enjoyed more poetical advantages than any other nation ; yet they were deficient in that which a philosophy more moral and a sensibility more profound would have added even to their poetry itself, namely, in the union of ideas and new impressions. It is a very easy task to follow the progress made by the Greeks in philosophy. *Æschylus*, *Sophocles*, and *Euripides*, successively introduced and advanced the moral of dramatic poetry ; and the sole occupation of *Socrates*, and of *Plato*, was to inculcate virtue and morality. *Aristotle* made rapid strides in the science of analysis ; *Pindar* composed his odes after the time of *Homer* and *Hesiod*, in that period of the age which was most remarkable for superior compositions in poetry ; and even then their ideas of moral virtue were very undecided ; they authorized anger, revenge, and all the impetuous passions of the soul. *Herodotus*, who existed about that period, speaks of virtue and vice with the presaging tongue of an oracle : a crime, he declares, appears to him like a bad omen ; but he never appeals to conscience to prove that it is actually so. The word *virtue* had no positive signification with the Greek writers of that period : *Pindar* gave the appellation of *virtuous* to those who excelled and triumphed in the Olympic games, and also to those who were most skilful in the art of chariot-racing. Thus were their successes, their pleasures, the will of their gods, and the duties of man, all confounded by their inordinate imaginations ; and their sensitive existence seemed alone capable of making any deep and lasting impression on them. But the incertitude of their morals is no proof of the depravity of that age ; it simply proves how little their ideas were turned towards philosophy ; every thing combined to divert them from meditation, and nothing induced them to return to it. Solid reflections are very seldom to be met with in the Greek poetry, and much less do we find a genuine spirit of sensibility.

Every man, without doubt, at some period of his life, has experienced the painful sensations of a troubled mind, and will feel and acknowledge the energetic descriptions of *Homer* : but the power of love seems to have kept pace with the other progresses of the human intellect. Certain prostitutes, lost to every sense of shame ; slaves, rendered contemptible by their abject state ; and women, secluded from the rest of the world, confined within their own houses, entire strangers to the interests of their husbands, and educated in such a manner as to render them unfit for comprehending any idea, any sentiment ; these were the only ties of affection with which the Greeks were acquainted. Little or no respect was paid to mothers by their sons. *Telemachus* commands *Penelope* to keep silence ; and *Penelope* retires, penetrated with admiration at the depth of her son's wisdom.

The Greeks never expressed, nor were they indeed acquainted with, the first and most noble of the sentiments of the human mind,—friendship in love ! Nor, till women were called up to, share the destiny of their husbands, were they supposed by them to be possessed of souls capable of as great and heroic deeds as their own. Love, as depicted by the ancients, was a disorder, a spell thrown over them by the gods ; it was of delirium, which sought for no moral perfecting object beloved. What they understood by it, existed only between men ; but the Greeks knew, and the manners of the age they lived in

standing : nor did they believe that, under the influence of sincere affection, they could become faithful companions for life ; nor, that it would constitute their own supreme felicity to devote their time and talents towards rendering the object of their attachment happy. The total want of this sentiment is discovered, not only in the description of love, but in every circumstance which regards the delicacy of the heart.

*Telemachus*, when he takes his departure to go in search of *Ulysses*, says, *‘that if he should be apprised of the death of his father, his first care on his return would be to erect a monument to his memory, and persuade his mother to take a second husband.’* The Greeks paid all due honor to their dead ; the dogmas of their religion expressly ordered them to watch over the funeral pomp ; but a melancholy and lasting regret was not in their nature ; it is in the hearts of women that sorrow takes up its abode. I shall often have occasion to remark the changes that have been made in literature since the period when women were admitted to partake of the moral life of men.

After having attempted to show whence arose the original beauties of the Greek poetry, and the defects which were incident to it at that remote period of civilization ; it will remain to examine the extent of influence the government and the national spirit of Athens had in the rapid progress of all degrees of literature. It cannot be denied, that the legislation of a country is all-powerful in its influence over the habits, taste, and talents of its inhabitants ; since *Lacedæmon* existed by the side of Athens, in the same century, under the same climate, with nearly the same religion ; and yet nothing, it must with truth be observed, could be more different than their manners and customs. All the institutions of Athens were calculated to excite emulation. The Athenians had not always been free : but the spirit of encouragement never ceased to thrive among them in full vigor : no nation ever paid more homage to distinguished talents ; and it was the desire of admiration, that gave birth to the superior productions which merited it.

The Greeks, even in their infant state, were the only civilized country, in the midst of a world of savages ; they were few in number, but were looked up to with respect by the surrounding nations : they united the double advantages of having but a small territory to guard, and the great theatre of the world for action. That emulation which owes its birth to a certainty of being known in our own country, excites the ambition of immortal honor. Their population was very circumscribed, and the bonds of slavery, by which nearly one half were kept in subjection, diminished the class of citizens, and in a still greater degree, restricted the light of knowledge to a small number of competitors, who were continually stimulating each other, and making comparisons among themselves.

The democratical form of government, which called all the men of distinguished talents to situations of eminence, naturally occupied their minds with public affairs : nevertheless, the Athenians did not devote themselves entirely to the political interest of their country ; they loved and cultivated the fine arts. They were jealous of preserving their rank as the first among the enlightened nations ; and the hatred and contempt in which they held those whom they esteemed the barbarians, strengthened and confirmed them in their taste for the fine arts and *belles lettres*. It would not certainly be much better for mankind at large, if the light of knowledge was more generally spread throughout the world : but the emulation of the favored few who possess it, is heightened by its partial distribution : the life of a celebrated man was more glorious in ancient times ; but that of an obscure individual is more happy in this modern period.

to this, that they decreed a sentence of death against any person who should propose to employ, even towards the military service of their country, any part of the money appropriated for the public festivals. They were not, like the Romans, inspired with an ardent desire of conquest. They repelled the barbarians indeed; but this they did merely with a view of preserving their own superior taste and manners uncontaminated: and the highest value they set on liberty was, that it procured them a free and uninterrupted enjoyment of all kinds of pleasures. Neither were they possessed of that abhorrence of tyranny which a certain elevation of soul, and dignity of manners, gave to the Romans. They took no care to secure a permanency in their legislation; they simply wished to lighten it of every fatigue, and lay their chiefs under the necessity of pleasing, and keeping possession of the affections of the people.

All kinds of talents were applauded with rapture by the Athenians: and the homage paid to their great men, amounted almost to adoration. Nothing serves as a greater proof of the distrust with which their insatiable love of admiration and propensity to enthusiasm inspired them, than their Ostracism, or law of exile. Nothing was left undone that could create a thirst for glory, or add brilliancy to fame. The tragic authors, before they commenced their career, offered sacrifices on the tomb of Æschylus. Pindar and Sophocles, with their lyres in their hands, appeared at the public spectacles crowned with laurel, and covered with the designation of the oracle.

The art of printing, so favorable to the progress and diffusion of knowledge, is prejudicial to poetry; which may be studied, analyzed, and corrected, till much of its native beauty is destroyed by refinement:—whereas the Greeks sung their simple harmony, and received its original impressions accompanied with music, when the heart was exhilarated and expanded by conviviality, which inspired that festivity which men of kindred mind and manners never fail of communicating to each other. Some of the characters of the Grecian poetry may be attributed to the manner of its success; their compositions were even read in due form to the public: melancholy and reflection, those solitary occupants of the mind, are little suited to a crowd and the bustle of life.

When men are assembled together, their spirits are exhilarated, and the imagination naturally becomes more susceptible of receiving lively and agreeable impressions; of this truth the poets were sensible, and turned such knowledge to their own advantage. The monotony of the Pindaric hymns, which is so irksome to us, was esteemed quite the reverse at the Grecian festivals. Some airs, which have produced the greatest effect imaginable on the minds of those inhabiting dreary and mountainous countries, were artless, and composed of very few notes. It was, perhaps, the same with the ideas contained in the lyric poetry of the Greeks; for similar imagery, sentiments, and harmony, were certain of drawing the desired applause from the multitude.

The approbation of the Greeks was expressed in much more lively terms than the deliberate commendation of the moderns. A great deal of rivalry must necessarily exist in a country where such great encouragement was given to distinguished talents; but this competition, in itself, contributed to the advancement of the sciences. The most glorious triumph the Greeks could obtain, excited much less hatred than the limited applause resulting from the niggard hand of modern criticism.

Amongst the ancients, genius was allowed a certain degree of self-approbation; and those who fancied they had any claim to renown, were induced without fear to announce themselves as candidates for fame; the nation was even pleased to witness what they esteemed laudable ambition: but at the present period, superior

to glide imperceptibly into celebrity, and to steal from men their admiration:—it is important, not only to calm their apprehensions by assuming the greatest humility, but a total indifference to applause must also be affected, if they wish to obtain it. The comprehensive mind is wounded by such restraint; elevated genius requires more latitude properly to expand itself, and is therefore disgusted by being thus cramped; and talents, which might have proved of the utmost consequence to mankind, are often crushed before they are sufficiently understood. It is true, that, among the Greeks, envy sometimes existed between rival candidates for fame: but in these days it has passed from them to the spectators, and, by one of the most unaccountable caprices that ever affected the mind of man, the bulk of mankind are jealous of the efforts made with an intention of adding to their pleasures, and to secure their approbation.

## CHAPTER II.

### OF THE GRECIAN TRAGEDIES.

It is from theatrical productions in particular, that we are enabled to form an accurate idea of the manners, customs, and laws of the country, in which they were composed and represented with success. A dramatic author, to acquire the reward of his merit, must, independently of his literary abilities, be thoroughly acquainted with men, their manners and their prejudices; and possess, in a certain degree, a knowledge of the politics of his country.

The fundamental bases of tragedy are affliction, and death, which are always softened and divested of their usual terrors by religion. We will now proceed to examine, how far the tragedies of the Greeks were influenced by their notion of religion, and what degree of power it possessed over the minds of men.

The religion of the Greeks was in itself highly theatrical: we are told, that the 'Eumenides,' a tragedy of Æschylus, produced one time so wondrous an impression, that pregnant woman could not endure the spectacle: but it was the terrific view of the infernal regions, and the power of superstition, more than the splendor of the drama, that caused these violent emotions.

The poet, in exciting the different passions of the human mind, disposed of its faith in religious matters at the same time. If this tragedy, which made so deep an impression on the minds of the Greeks, had been represented in another country, and in the presence of an audience of a different persuasion, the effects would have been totally changed. We shall have occasion to observe, in examining the state of literature in the northern countries, what kind of emotions were produced by a religion of a different description: and I shall endeavor to explain, in treating of modern literature, that the Christian religion is in itself too awful and mysterious to be introduced with propriety upon the stage. Our dramatic writers can only hope to excite an interest, and move the passions, by an energetic representation of them. But I shall at present confine myself to a farther description of the Greeks, endeavoring to elucidate what impressions the sight of sufferings and death made upon their minds, and in what manner they considered the illicit wanderings of the passions.

The religion of the Greeks attributed to their pretended gods a supreme power of inflicting remorse on the guilty: and their theatres represented the torments of criminals in so horrid a manner, as to fill the minds of the spectators with an insuperable terror: by means also of this sensation, the legislators were enabled to exercise a greater degree of power, and the principles of morality were more firmly binding among men.

The image of death presented a much less gloomy aspect to the ancients than to the moderns: their belief in paganism calmed their fears, by representing a future state in the most brilliant and pleasing colors. The ancients materialized it by their recitals, their descriptions, and their paintings; and the abyss which nature has placed between our existence and immortality, was as it were filled up by their mythology.

The Greeks were much less susceptible of calamity than any other nation of antiquity; their political institutions, and national spirit, disposed their minds more to pleasure and contentment; and examples of suicide were much less frequent with them than with the Romans; but the fortitude which enabled them to support misfortune, is chiefly to be attributed to their superstition. Their oracles, their dreams, their presentiments, and every circumstance which throws into the scale of human events the *extraordinary* and the *unforeseen*, did not suffer them to credit that any irrevocable calamity could happen. Thus was despair kept at a distance by hope, which, even in the most perilous situations, suggested, that some miracle might still be exerted in their favor. The calculation of moral probabilities might frequently have destroyed the delusion: but when the mind once imbibes supernatural ideas, the *impossible* appears to have no existence. The Greeks never felt, and could not therefore have explained, that dejection and depression of spirits so mournfully expressed in the writings of Shakspeare.

The great men of antiquity were exposed to severe trials; but they were never forgotten or overlooked by their country: great misfortunes astonished them, and they imputed their origin to supernatural causes, and the immediate displeasure of their gods. The religion of the Greeks is, to us, nothing more than poetry; for it is impossible that their tragedies can ever inspire us with the same emotions they themselves experienced in hearing them recited. The Greek authors grounded their success on a number of tragical events which coincided with the dark credulity of the age in which they were written; and thus supplied by religious terrors their want of more natural emotions.

Almost every circumstance with the Greeks had novelty to recommend it; even the passion of grief, if the term may be admitted, was in its infancy. The expression of hope and ardent expectation was always certain of exciting a tender compassion; and the assurance that the audience would take the most lively interest in every species of distress, gave a confidence to the poet: he did not apprehend (what ought and would be feared in these more enlightened days, even in fiction,) that he should fatigue his hearers by his plaintive tale; as if misfortune, represented on the tablets of the imagination, were still in the presence of egotism.

The *distress* of the Greeks wore an august appearance; it furnished the painter with noble attitudes, and the poets with images which commanded respect; it also gave to religion a new and more solemn appearance: yet with all these advantages, the sentiments inspired by the modern tragedies are more profound and lasting. The representations of later times do not simply offer a picture of majestic *distress*, but distress, solitary, and without support,—distress such as nature and society have made it.

The Greeks did not, like us, require a continual change of situation and contrast of characters; the effect of their tragedies was not brightened by the opposition of shades; their dramatic art resembled their paintings, where the most vivid colors and the most various objects were placed upon the same plan, without any observance of perspective. The greater part of the Grecian tragedies being founded on the action and will of the gods, an exact appearance of truth, the *gradation of natural events*, was dispensed with, and the greatest effect was produced without any progressive gradation. The mind was prepared by their reli-

gion for the *horrific*, and by their faith for the *wonderful*. The Greeks had not to encounter the difficulties of the dramatic art; they did not attempt to draw characters with that philosophical truth attempted by the moderns; the contrast of virtue and vice, the struggles of conscience, the mixture and opposition of sentiments, which in these days must be delineated in order to interest the human heart, was by them hardly understood; the words of an oracle were at all times sufficient for the Greeks.

Orestes murdered his mother, and Electra encouraged him without a moment's hesitation or regret; the remorse of Orestes, after the death of Clytemnestra, did not arise from the struggles he had experienced before the act was committed: the oracle of Apollo had commanded the sacrifice! but when it was accomplished, the Furies unrelentingly seized the criminal. The sentiments of the man are with difficulty distinguished through his actions: the reflections, the doubts, the deliberations, and the fears, are all left for the chorus to develop: the heroes act only by order of the gods.

Racine, in some of his compositions written in imitation of the Greeks, explains the crimes that were commanded by the gods, by reasons drawn from the passions of the human mind, and places a moral development by the side of fatalism: this explanation was certainly necessary in a country whose inhabitants had no belief in paganism; but with the Greeks, the tragic effects were still more terrible, as they were founded upon supernatural causes; and the confidence annexed to them by the Greeks rendered the mind effeminate, and deprived it of its independence. Every sentiment was decided by a religious dogma, in which they had such faith, that every tree, and every fountain, was personified as a divinity. Nobody could refrain from showing pity to one who might appear before him, bearing an olive-branch adorned with little fillets, or who could approach near enough to touch the sacred altar: this was the sole subject of the tragedy of the 'Suppliants.' The belief of the Greeks in the fabulous, gave a poetical elegance to every action of their lives; but it banished habitually every thing that had in it any irregularity, every thing unforeseen and irresistible, from the heart.\*

Love, with the Greeks, was like all other violent passions,—it was nothing more than a fatality. In their tragedies, as well as in their poems, we are continually struck with observing how little they understood of the real affections of the heart, before women were called upon to feel and to judge. Alcestes gave his life for Admetus; but during his indecision, was he not urged in the strongest manner by Euripides to engage the father of Admetus to devote himself in her place? The Greeks could paint a generous action, but they were ignorant of the pleasure derived from braving death for a beloved object; neither did they conceive what jealousy may be attached to the being without a rival in this personal sacrifice.

It has been said with truth, that the greater part of the dramatic writings of the Greeks would be ill adapted to the modern theatres in France, were they to be literally translated: notwithstanding, so many original beauties would not fail to excite admiration; but the total want of delicacy in the exceptionable passages could not be endured at this enlightened period. We may be easily convinced of this truth by the comparison of the two Phædras. Racine once attempted to introduce love upon the French stage, in imitation of the Greeks; a love that was to be attributed to the vengeance of the gods: nevertheless, on the same subject, how much difference may be observed in the manners

\* It happens sometimes, that the mythological dogmas, in the writings of the ancients, add to the effect of moving emotions; but it happens more frequently, that the power of these dogmas dispenses with the examination of the feelings whence arise the emotions of the heart; and the passions are consequently neither developed nor duly considered.

and customs of the age ! Euripides might have said to Phædra,

'Ce n'est plus une ardeur dans mes veines cachée,  
'C'est Vénus toute entière à sa proie attachée.'

The following lines would never have been thought of by a Greek :

'Ils ne se verront plus ;—  
—ils s'aimeront toujours.'

The Greek tragedies were at that era much inferior to our modern compositions of the same description ; because the dramatic talent of this time consists not only of the art of poetry, but a profound knowledge of the passions ; which clearly discovers that the improvement in tragedy arises from the increased progress of the human intellect.

The Greeks are not less admirable in this kind of ambition than other nations : this truth is farther confirmed, when we compare their success with the period in which they flourished. They transferred to their theatres every thing that was beautiful in the imagination of the poets, with the characters of antiquity and the worship of their gods. And philosophy was much farther advanced in the time of Pericles, than in that of Homer : their dramatic writers began also to acquire some depth.

There is a very visible improvement in the three great tragedians, Æschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides ; though there is too much distance between Æschylus and the two latter, to be able to account for his superiority by the natural progress of the human mind in so short a space of time : but Æschylus had witnessed only the prosperity of Athens : Sophocles and Euripides beheld the reverse ; their dramatic genius was brought forward and ripened : calamity too has its fecundity.

No moral conclusion can be drawn from the works of Æschylus ; he scarcely ever unites the sufferings of the body with those of the mind by any reflections. A shriek, a groan, a lamentation without any explanation, expresses the impression of the moment, and presents us with a portrait of what the mind was, before reflection had placed within us a witness of our interior emotions.

Sophocles often mixes philosophical axioms with the language of the heart. Euripides is lavish of his maxims in the discourses of his personages, without their always according with their particular situations and character.

In perusing the works of these three great tragic writers, we are made acquainted with their personal talents, and the development and progress of those of the age they lived in ; but not one of them equalled the perfection of the English writers, in displaying melancholy sensations, and the extent of human woe. The modern writers excel in pathetic representation ; they are aware of the tender sources that render men's hearts accessible to pity ; and it requires a knowledge of calamity to create an interest sufficiently strong to present it with success to the view of the mind.

The numerous rewards bestowed by the Greeks on those who were possessed of a dramatic genius, encouraged, in a great measure, the progress of the art ; but the exultation arising from the homage that was paid to them, proved, in a great measure, destructive to theatrical talents. The poet, rendered vain by extravagant applause, was himself in too tranquil a disposition of mind to give dignity to distress, and adequate strength to melancholy expression. In the modern tragedies, we are led to perceive by the character of the style, that the author has himself experienced some of the calamities which he represents.

The Grecian tragedies were remarkable for their purity of language. As they preceded all other writers, *they could not have been imitators ; their style at first might be considered as being too simple, rather than too studied.*

Modern literature aimed at greater excellence, or at least, to differ from the ancients : it is certain that the Greeks, as they had nature alone for their model, might sometimes be accused of inelegance and coarseness of expression ; but they could not be charged with affectation. The Greeks pursued the straight path of literary fame, and their efforts never failed of success.

It may be said, that the productions which they introduced upon the stage were extended to an unreasonable length : but they were perfectly adapted to the age in which they were written : the spectators had not as yet learned to become weary at these representations ; their attention being kept alive, they were far from wishing a rapid transition in the scenes presented to them ; they were pleased with the details, and would have been dissatisfied had they been abridged.

The Greeks, according to the system of the present times, committed many errors with respect to women : in their tragedies, men appeared in female characters ; and they were incapable of understanding the force and delicacy, annexed to charms, which the moderns attach to the persons of the softer sex. It must however be confessed, with the exceptions of a few criticisms, that the Greek tragedies possess, with much beauty, a perfect regularity. People so impetuous in their political discussions, had in all their arts, comedy excepted, a dignified moderation : it is to their religion that we must attribute their stability in whatever was noble or sublime.

The inhabitants of Athens did not pursue the present practice of the English theatrical writers ; they objected to the grotesque and vulgar scenes of common life being mixed with grand and heroic characters. The Greeks represented their tragedies in those festivals which were consecrated to their gods ; they were generally founded upon religion, and a pious veneration suggested the propriety of separating from their compositions, as they did from their sacred temples, every impure and ignoble idea. The heroes, as described by their dramatic writers, had not that steady elevation of character which was given them by Racine, but this difference cannot be attributed to a popular condescension ; all the poets portrayed their characters in this manner, before monarchy and chivalry had given another turn to their ideas.

The greater part of the dramatic character of the Greeks was taken from the Iliad, or from the Heroic history of that period. The impressive idea which Homer gave of his heroes, was of singular utility to the dramatic writers of that age : the names alone of Ajax, Achilles, and Agamemnon, produced an emotion with which the remembrance of those heroes always inspired the Greeks. The greatest interest was next excited by their situations ; their fate seemed the fate of each individual, and their cause was the cause of the nation : the dramatic poets, in representing them, had only to display the ideas already received : they were not under the necessity of creating both character and situation ; the greatest respect and interest were previously excited for the personages they wished to introduce.

Our modern writers have been indebted to the august celebrity of the tragic personages of antiquity ; their finest and most natural passions are copied from the Greeks : it is not because they are superior to the moderns, but the Greeks certainly first pointed out the predominant affections and passions, the leading features of which must ever remain the same.

Our tragic representations of maternal tenderness have all in some degree a resemblance to that of Clytemnestra, and every filial sacrifice must bring to our remembrance that of Antigone.

In short, there exists in moral nature, as in the light of the sun, a certain number of rays which will produce either distinct or opposite colors, which you may vary by mixing them ; but a single new one cannot be created. The three tragic authors of Greece wrote all upon the same subject, without giving themselves the

trouble of inventing any thing new ; it was neither expected nor desired by the spectators, nor thought of by the poet : and had they even attempted it, they might not have succeeded. The happy conception of extraordinary events is much more the production of tradition than of the poets : a connection of ideas may conduct us to philosophical discoveries ; but our first devices and inventions, with regard to poetry, are almost always the effects of chance.

History, customs and manners, and even the popular tales, assist the imagination of the writers. Sophocles would never have invented the subject of Tancred from his own conceptions, nor Voltaire that of *Cædipus*. Nothing novel in the marvelous can be discovered, when the credulity of the multitude withdraws its aid.

The importance given to the chorusses, which stood forward as the representatives of the people, is almost the only trace of republican spirit which can be remarked in the Grecian tragedies ; their comedies indeed frequently recall the recollection of the politics of the nation ; but their tragedies were always filled with the misfortunes and distresses of kings,\* which interested the spectators in their fate. A parade of regal pomp was still observed at Athens, although they loved and preferred a republican government. But it does not appear that the Greeks were possessed of that enthusiasm for liberty by which the Romans were distinguished ; this arose probably from their having had less difficulties to struggle with in the obtaining it. They had not, like the Romans, to expel a race of cruel kings, the very remembrance of whom was capable of inspiring them with the greatest horror. The love of liberty was with the Greeks a habit, a manner of existence, but not a predominant passion.

The Athenians were partial to their own institutions and to their country ; though it was not with them as with the Romans, an exclusive sentiment : they received new pleasures in whatever was represented before them. Their tragedies were a true characteristic of their democracy ; their principal subjects were filled with reflections upon the rapid reverse of fate, and the uncertainty of fortune. The sudden and frequent revolutions of a popular government often lead the mind to observations of this nature.

Racine did not imitate the Greeks in this respect. Under the reign of a monarch so arbitrary as Louis XIV, his own decisions usurped the place of fate, and consequently no one dared to suppose him guilty of caprice ; but in a country where the people predominate, that which most impresses the mind, is the fate of individuals ; their sudden transitions being equally rapid and terrible, as they frequently fall from the pinnacle of grandeur into the abyss of adversity.

The Greek tragic authors always endeavor to revive those impressions which have been considered as the most affecting spectacles to the people who are to listen to them ; the heart is often sensibly touched by retrospect, at least such a measure is always a step towards it. It is not necessary in sentiment as in the works of lighter fancy, to arrest the attention by novelty. No ; when an audience is to be melted into tears, it is the *past* which must be recalled.

### CHAPTER III.

#### OF THE GREEK COMEDIES.

Comedy requires a much deeper and more exten-

\* Barthelmy in his celebrated travels of the young Anacharsis, says, that the Athenians represented the misfortunes of kings upon their theatres, in order to fortify the republican spirit of the people ; but I cannot think, that to be continually representing the misery and distress of kings, was the most proper or likely method to destroy the love of regal power : great disasters are in themselves highly dramatic, they affect and take deep root in the imagination ; this then cannot be the means of conquering such prejudices, or indeed those of any other kind.

sive knowledge of the human heart, than tragedy : it is less difficult to portray what so frequently strikes the imagination as the picture of distress : it may also be admitted, that tragic characters bear a certain resemblance toward each other, which excludes critical observation ; and the models of heroic history have clearly pointed out the method which they must pursue.

But it was the labour of ages to bring the understanding to that requisite degree of taste and superior philosophy, which justly distinguished the dramatic works of Moliere ; and even had as great a genius as this author possessed existed among the Athenians they would not have discovered the beauty of his productions, or even have understood his superior merit.

We look back with astonishment while reading the plays of Aristophanes, and find it difficult to conceive it possible that productions of such a nature could gain so great a degree of applause in the age of Pericles ; and likewise that the Greeks, who possessed a superior taste in the fine arts, could be entertained with vulgarity of so disgusting a nature. We must thence conclude that their taste was only good when it was annexed to the imagination ; but defective in what arose from morality and sentiment. The Greeks were fond of every species of the beautiful, yet they erred through want of delicacy, and even of the decency due to society.

The Athenians were ever inspired with more enthusiasm than respect for great and sublime characters ; religion, power, misfortune genius, and whatever struck the imagination, excited in them a degree of fanaticism ; but these impressions were of short duration, and gave place with equal facility to any other of as lively description.

Whatever requires to be performed by slow and cautious degrees, does not accord with democracy. As it was by the spectators that the actors were to be heard and applauded, authors were obliged, in a great measure, to conform to their taste, and amuse them by low incidents and sallies of wit ; which, however, too frequently have a similar effect on those in higher stations.

Tragedy was less affected by this desire to please the multitude : it formed, as has been before observed, a part of their religious festivals. Besides, it is not necessary to consult either the taste or knowledge of the people in order to touch their feeling ; the soft emotion of pity finds the same way to the heart in all ranks and conditions. It is to mankind at large that tragedy is addressed ; but comedy relates only to the precise period in which it is written :—the people, the manners, and the customs must be understood and consulted, in order to obtain popular success. Mirth is derived from habit : but tears are drawn from nature.

The principles of morality commonly serve to regulate the taste of the lower orders of society, and often to enlighten them even in literature. The people of Athens did not possess that scrupulous morality which can supply the place of the finest principles : they resigned themselves entirely to religious superstitions, which afforded them a very imperfect idea of the reality of virtue ; they transgressed all bounds of principle and decency in the eager pursuit of their amusements.

The exclusion of women from the Greek theatres was one of the chief causes of its imperfections. The authors have no motive for concealment, there was no restriction of language necessary to be observed ; and nothing being left to the imagination, they were consequently deficient in that grace, elegance, and modesty, which is so striking to the modern reader. It is also a fact, that the masks, speaking-trumpets, and all the absurd fantastical customs of the ancient theatres, disposed the mind, like caricatures in drawings



to study the grotesque and unnatural; but were totally contrary to the simplicity of nature.

Aristophanes sometimes availed himself of the gross jests and buffoonery of the populace: he likewise presented the reverse of what was vulgar and inelegant; but it was never a clear representation of situations, or an accurate description of characters that he explained; nor did he point out the irregularities of mankind to the ridicule of society.

The greater part of the dramatic works of Aristophanes were relatively connected with the events of the times in which they were written: they had not, at that early period, acquired the art of exciting popular curiosity, by a representation of romantic intrigue. The comic art, in its state of Grecian simplicity, certainly could not have existed without having recourse to allusions; they were not in possession of a sufficient knowledge of the secret passions of the human heart, to create any interest in the recital of them; but it was always an easy matter to please the people, by turning their chiefs into ridicule: thus were compositions founded on the circumstances of the moment, and they were certain of being received with applause; but they were not calculated to obtain a lasting reputation.

The portraits of living characters, and the epigrams upon contemporary events, like a family jest, were merely the whim and success of the day, which could not fail to fatigue and disgust the subsequent ages. Nothing could be more likely than that representations of this nature should annually decrease in the merit ascribed to them; because memory fails in retracing the subjects therein alluded to, and the judgment by this means is inadequate to unravel the beauty and gaiety of such writings: whenever it requires reflection in order to comprehend the point and sense of a jest, the effect of it must be entirely lost.

But in tragedy the case is very different; the spectators consider nothing farther than the illusion; they are sufficiently interested in the hero of the piece, to understand foreign manners and customs, and to transport themselves ideally into countries and places entirely new: the emotion of which they are susceptible, inclines them to conceive and adopt every thing presented to their view. In comedy the imagination of the audience is quiet and tranquil, and therefore does not afford the least assistance to the author: the impression of mirth is so light and spontaneous, that the most feeble efforts, or the slightest absence of mind, is enough to prevent the effect.

Aristophanes grounded his plays on the circumstances of the day: because the Greeks were destitute of that philosophical reflection, which admits the ready comprehension of characters, and which would have enabled them to understand a composition that would have proved interesting to men of all ages and nations.

The comedies of Menander and the characters of Theophrastus made a great progress; the one in theatrical decency, and the other in the observations of the human heart: but both these writers had the advantage of being in repute a century later than Aristophanes. In a country where democracy is established, authors in general are seduced to introduce upon the stage illusions to public affairs, by the irresistible hope and charm of popular applause; which will always prove inimical to the theatrical productions of a free people. I am ignorant whether such representations are a sign of liberty; but I am certain they are the destruction of the dramatic art.

The Athenians, as I have before observed, were extremely inclined to enthusiasm; but they were not less partial to that species of satire which insulted men of superior station and abilities; the comedies of Athens, like the journals of France, were favorable to the display of a democratic levelling spirit; but with this difference, that the plays at that period were filled

with personalities against existing characters; which was an attack so gross in its nature, that no man of honor in our times could reconcile it to his feelings.

In these days, we count too little upon admiration, not to be apprehensive of slander; and are too readily forsaken by our friends, not to guard against the machinations of our enemies. In Athens, persons accused could make themselves known, and justify themselves before the nation at large: but in our numerous associations, we could only oppose the tardy light of literature to the animated ridicule of the theatre; and against such an unequal contest, no character, no authority, could maintain its ground.

The republic of Athens itself owed its subjection entirely to the abuse of the comic powers; and the excessive love of the Athenians for that species of amusement which increased their inordinate desire of procuring constant diversion and frivolous occupations. The comedy of 'Nubes' prepared the minds of the populace for the accusation of Socrates. Demosthenes, in the following century, could not draw the attention of the people from their lighter pursuits to engage them against Philip. What was most seriously feared for the republic, was the too great ascendancy which might be acquired by one of its great men: but that which tended to its overthrow was its total indifference for them all.

After having sacrificed their glory to their amusements, the Athenians saw even their independence ravished from them, and with it those very enjoyments which they had preferred to the defence of their liberties.

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### OF THE PHILOSOPHY AND ELOQUENCE OF THE GREEKS.

Philosophy and eloquence were often united among the Athenians; the systems, metaphysics, and politics of Plato, contributed much less to his reputation than the beauty and grandeur of his style. The Greek philosophers were, generally speaking, extremely eloquent upon the subject of abstract ideas.

I must, however, first examine their system of philosophy, apart from their eloquence: and my design is, to investigate the progress of the human understanding: a knowledge of philosophy can alone point this out with any degree of certainty.

Whether in the poetical department, or in the interesting political discussions of a free nation, eloquence had attained that degree of perfection with the Greeks, which has served for a model to the subsequent ages, even down to the present time: but their philosophy appears to me much inferior to that of their imitators, the Romans. The modern philosophy has still greater superiority over that of the Greeks; and this is no more than might be expected, when we consider the advantages that must be derived from the lapse of two thousand years.

The Greeks improved themselves in a most remarkable manner during the course of three centuries: in the last, which was that of Alexander, Menander, Theophrastus, Euclid, and Aristotle, they were evidently distinguished by their progress, in every species of refinement: but one of the principal and final causes of the great events which are known to us, appears to be the civilization of the world. I shall explain this assertion more at large elsewhere: at present, what is immediately necessary to be observed is, simply, how far the Greeks were accessory to the diffusion of knowledge, and the means they pursued in order to excite that persevering spirit necessary to its attainment.

The Greek philosophers instituted sects:—an expedient which proved as useful to them, as it would be

prejudicial to us; their searches after truth included every thing that could strike the imagination. The walks, beneath the expanse of a serene sky, where the young pupils would gather round their preceptor, and listen to the sublime sentiments he uttered;—the harmonious language which elevated the soul, even before it was fully impressed with the sense of what was spoken;—the mystery used at Eleusis in the discovery and communication of certain principles of morality;—all these things combined to give the greatest effect to their lessons of philosophy. The world, in its infancy, was taught truth by the assistance of the marvelous in mythology. Thus was a taste for study produced and preserved by a thousand different ways; and the encomiums bestowed on the disciples of philosophy, greatly augmented their number.

Nothing contributes more to give us an enlarged idea of the reputation of the ancients, than the astonishing effect produced by their works; but this is by no means an accurate rule by which they should be judged. The limited number of enlightened men which Greece held out to the admiration of the rest of the world, the great difficulties attending nautical discoveries, the ignorance in which the chief part of the community remained with regard to the reality of facts collected by the authors, the rarity of their manuscripts, all contributed to inspire the most lively curiosity for works of celebrity. The multiplied testimonies of the general interest excited the philosophers to overcome the greatest difficulties that were annexed to their studies, before they were abridged by method and generalizations. Modern fame would not have been considered an adequate compensation, for such extraordinary efforts of the mind: nothing less than the brilliant honors conferred on genius by the ancients, could have encouraged them to persevere in a task so laborious. It is granted, that the ancient philosophers acquired a more shining reputation than the moderns; but it is also true, that the moderns, in metaphysics, in morals, and in most of the sciences, are infinitely superior to the ancients.

The philosophers of antiquity may be said to have refuted some of the errors prevalent at that era; but they were not themselves entirely exempt from many of them. While we must admit, that the most absurd opinions were generally established, even the writers who appeal to the light of reason, cannot entirely divest themselves of the prejudices by which they are encompassed. Sometimes they substitute one error in the place of another, which they had successfully combated; at other times, in making their attack upon generally received opinions, they are but too apt to retain a degree of superstition peculiar to themselves. Casual words appeared very formidable to Pythagoras, Socrates, and Plato, who had faith in the existence of familiar spirits; and Cicero was alarmed at the presages conveyed in dreams. But when calamity or distress of any description bears heavily on the human mind, it is difficult, if not impossible, entirely to eradicate the degree of superstition it is naturally inclined to admit: the interior sensation that should abolish such weakness, is not sufficiently strong; and the mind never feels itself secure, unless depending for support upon something independent of itself. Those who minutely study their own hearts, will find that, in every calamity of life, they are more inclined to rely on the opinion of others than on their own ideas and reflections; and to seek elsewhere for the motive of their hopes and fears, rather than apply to a more certain guide,—that of their own reason. A man, however superior his faculties may be, feels it a difficult task, by his own efforts, to free himself from a portion of the supernatural, which is inherent in his nature: the nation at large must unite with philosophy against absurd terrors and superstitions, or it would be impossible even for philosophy itself to be successful.

The minds of the Greeks were foolishly engrossed by researches into the different systems of the world.

The smaller the progress they had made in science, the less they were acquainted with the extent of the human understanding. The philosophers delighted themselves particularly in the *unknown*, and the *inexplicable*. Pythagoras declared that *there was nothing real, but what was spiritual; and that the material had no existence*.—Plato, that writer whose imagination was so brilliant, is continually reverting to whimsical metaphysics relative to the world, to men, and to love; where the physical laws of the universe, and the verification of sentiments, are never observed. There is nothing more wearisome than the study of that species of metaphysics, which has neither facts for its foundation, nor method for its guide: and it is surely impossible not to be convinced of this truth, in reading the philosophical writings of the Greeks, notwithstanding we may fully admit the charms of their language.

The ancients were better skilled in morals than in philosophy: an accurate study of the sciences is necessary to rectify metaphysics: but nature has placed in the heart of man a guide to conduct him to virtue: nevertheless, nothing could be more unsettled and unconnected than the moral code of the ancients. Pythagoras seems to attach the same importance to proverbs, to counsels of prudence and of dexterity, as he did to the precepts of virtue. Rank and morals were confounded by many of the Greek philosophers: the love of study, and the performance of the first duties, were classed together. In their enthusiasm for the faculties of the mind, they allowed them a place of esteem beyond every thing else: they excited men to the acquirement of admiration; but they never looked with an eye of penetration into the heart.

I am doubtful whether the term *happiness* occurs once in any of the Greek writings, according to the modern acceptation of the word: nor did they annex any great importance to private virtues; the *political* was, with them, a branch of the *moral*: their meditations on men were made in society; and they seldom or ever judged them, but with relation to their fellow-citizens: and as the free states were but thinly peopled, and the women not considered as forming any part of it,\* the actual existence of the men consisted in their social relations: it was to complete this political existence, that the studies of the philosopher were exclusively applied. Plato, in his Republic, proposes, as a means of promoting the happiness of the human race, the extirpation of conjugal and paternal affection, by a community of women and children. A monarchical government, and the extent of modern powers, have disunited the greater part of the inhabitants from the interest of public affairs: they have retired into the bosom of their families, and have not diminished their happiness by the exchange: but every circumstance excited the ancients to continue in the path of politics, and the very first object of their moral was an encouragement to pursue it. What is truly beautiful in their doctrine does not contradict the assertion. If it is requisite, in all situations, for men to exercise a great power over themselves; it is, above all, to those in public stations that this power is necessary. How admirably is this moral, which consists in the tranquillity and vigor of mind and the enthusiasm of wisdom, set forth in the apology of Socrates and in the Phædon. If it were possible to instill into the mind that accurate order of ideas, it seems as if it would be invincibly armed against mankind.

The ancients, it is true, often founded part of their support in error; but after all, they followed what they thought and acknowledged to be right: but what is wanting at the present era, is an insurrection against egotism; for the moral virtue of each individual is found to centre in his own personal interest.

The Greek philosophers were very limited in their  
\* There is not to be found, in the characters of Theophrastus, a single description of a female.

number; and being unable to obtain any assistance from the light of former ages, they were compelled to make their studies universal: it was therefore impossible for them to proceed to a great length in any particular pursuit; and they wanted that method which can only be acquired by an accurate knowledge of the sciences.

Plato could not have arranged in his memory that which the aid of method enables the young men of modern times to do with the greatest facility. Socrates himself, in the dialogues of Plato, in order to confute the Sophists, borrows some of their own defaults; but more especially that insufferable procrastination of a development, which could not be supported in those days. We must have recourse to the ancients, for their beautiful and simple taste in the fine arts; we must admire their energy and enthusiasm for every thing that was good and sublime; but we must consider all their philosophical ratiocinations as the scaffolding of an edifice which the human mind has to raise.

Aristotle, however, who lived in the third century of the Greeks, a century consequently superior in the efforts of the imagination to the two preceding: Aristotle, I say, substituted the force of observation in the place of the energy of theory: and this distinction alone would have been sufficient to have established his fame; but he did not stop there; he wrote upon literature, physic, metaphysics, and these subjects formed the analysis of ideas in his own times. Being the historian of the progress of the sciences at that period, he digested and placed them methodically in the very order in which they were conceived by himself. This man was truly great, considering the age in which he lived; but it is difficult, if not altogether impossible, for the human mind to be continually employed in searching into antiquity for the truths of philosophy: this would be to carry the spirit of discovery to a retrospect of the past, when things present lay claim to their chief attention.

The ancients, but more particularly Aristotle, displayed a skill and judgment, in some of their political institutions, equal to those of the moderns, but this exception to the invariable rule of progression is entirely owing to the republican liberty which was enjoyed by the Greeks, but which is unknown to the moderns. Aristotle remained in the most profound ignorance respecting all general questions that had not been explained by preceding events in the history of his time: he does not admit of the existence of a natural right to slaves; and though an antagonist of Plato in many other respects, he does not appear to imagine it was possible that slavery could admit of modification. Plato speaks of the causes of revolutions, and the principles of government, with a superior penetration and judgment; but the greater part of his ideas were furnished by the examples of the Greek republic. If a republican government had existed since the time of Plato, the moderns would have been as much his superiors in the social arts, as they have been in every other intellectual study. The ideas must ever be informed by events: thus in examining the labors of the mind, we constantly observe that either time or circumstance is the clue by which genius is guided: reflection knows how to draw consequences from a single idea; but the first step in every thing is discovered by chance, and not by reflection.

The style of the Greek historians was remarkable for creating an interest, while it kept up without diminishing that beautiful simplicity so justly admired: their descriptions were full of vivacity, but they never investigated deeply into characters, nor judged by institutions: they caught at facts so eagerly, that they never carried their thoughts towards existing causes. In keeping pace with the events of their time, the Greek authors followed a certain impulse without considering whence it arose: it seems indeed, as if their

inexperience of life rendered them ignorant, whether the then state of existence could ever be altered; and they transmitted to posterity moral truths as well as physical facts, fine discourses as well as bad actions, and their mildest laws as well as the commands of tyrants, without analyzing either the characters or the principles: it might almost be said, that they portrayed the conduct of men like the vegetation of plants, without bestowing upon them the judgment of reflection.\* These observations are applicable to the historians of the first ages of the Greeks. Plutarch, and his contemporary Tacitus, lived in a different epoch of the advancement of the human understanding.

The eloquence of the Greek philosophers nearly equaled that of the Greek orators. Socrates and Plato preferred speaking to writing; because they felt, without exactly rendering to themselves an account of their talents, that their ideas belonged more to imitation than to analysis. They loved to have recourse to that impulse and elevation of thought which is produced by the animated language of conversation; and they searched with as much diligence for something to inflame the imagination, as the metaphysicians and moralists of our days would employ, to secure their works from the smallest appearance of the poetic.

The philosophical eloquence of the Greeks has a still greater effect upon us, by the grandeur and purity of the language: their mild yet energetic doctrines gave to their writings a character which time has not impaired. Ancient diction is very congenial to the simple beauties of composition, nevertheless we should find an insupportable monotony in the discourses of the Greek philosophers upon the affection, had they been written in these days: they have no power to create emotion, but are uniformly remarkable for melancholy and sensibility.

Morality and sensibility were not united in the opinions of the Stoics. Northern literature did not then exist, to instil a love of gloomy reflections: the human race if, the expression may be allowed, had not then reached the age of melancholy: men, when struggling with mental affliction, had recourse to violence, instead of that due resignation which does not endeavor to suppress pain, nor cause a blush at feeling regret: it is that submission alone, which can turn affliction to our advantage, and make it subservient even to the sublimity of our talents.

The eloquence of the Tribune, in the republic of Athens, was as perfect as was necessary to bring over the opinion of the auditors: and in a country where so great a political result was produced by rhetoric, this talent must necessarily develop itself. Eloquence was converted by the Athenians, while they remained a free people, into a kind of gymnastic, in which the orators seemed wrestling with the populace, and forcing their arguments upon them as if they were determined to overcome them. The subject most frequently treated upon by Demosthenes was the indignation with which he was inspired by the Athenians: this wrath against the people, natural enough in a republic, was mixed in all his orations,—when he speaks of himself, it is with rapidity and indifference.

In the following chapter, I shall examine some of the reasons which caused the political distinction that existed between Cicero and Demosthenes. It is generally remarked of the Greek orators, that they make use of but a very small number of original ideas: whether it was owing to their being able to strike the minds of the people with only a few arguments forcibly expressed and fully explained, or whether the ha-

\* Thucydides was certainly the most distinguished historian of the Greeks; all his descriptions are full of imagination, and his harangues, like those of Titus Livy, were composed in a style of the finest eloquence.

languages of the ancients displayed the same uniformity as their writings, it is certain that, generally speaking, they had not a great variety of ideas: their writings resembled the music of the Scots, who composed their airs of a few fine but simple notes, the perfect harmony of which, while it defied criticism could not create a very deep interest in the hearers.

We feel little cause of regret in taking leave of the Greeks, though truly an astonishing people: and the obvious reason for this indifference is, that they were the people who merely began the civilization of the world. They had, it is true, all the qualities requisite to excite the development of the human understanding: but we do not feel a similar sensation of pain at their disappearance from history, as is caused by the loss of the Romans. The customs and habits, the philosophical knowledge, and the military successes of the Greeks, could be but transitory; they resembled seed driven by the wind to every corner of the world, till none remained in the place whence it originally came.

The love of fame was the motive that guided every action of the Greeks: they studied the sciences, in order to be admired; they supported pain, to create interest; they adopted opinions, to gain disciples; and they defended their country, for the sake of ruling it: but they had not that internal sentiment, that national spirit, that devotion to their country, all which so eminently distinguished the Romans. The Greeks gave the first impulse to literature and the fine arts; but the Romans gave to the world invaluable testimonies of their genius.

## CHAPTER V.

### OF THE LATIN LITERATURE WHILE THE ROMAN REPUBLIC STILL EXISTED.

We must make a distinction in all the different stages of literature; dividing what is national from that which belongs to imitation. The Roman empire having succeeded to the dominion of Athens, the Latin literature followed the track which had been marked out by the Greeks: at first, because they might have considered it superior in many respects; and therefore to have swerved from it, would have been to have renounced truth and taste; and another probable reason why they conformed to it was, that they found a model which accorded with their own ideas and habits:—whenever this is the case, the mind is more inclined to adopt than create; necessity alone can produce invention, and mankind apply themselves in preference to improving, when they are saved the trouble of inventing.

The paganism of the Romans was very similar to that of the Greeks. The precepts of the fine arts and of literature, a great number of laws, and the greater part of their philosophical opinions, were transported successively from Greece into Italy. I shall not therefore attempt to analyze effects, which so nearly resemble each other, and which must have arisen from a similar cause: all that regards the Greek literature, the pagan religion, slavery, the customs and manners of the east, and the general spirit of antiquity before the invasion of the north, and the establishment of the Christian religion, will be found, with some few restrictions, among the Latins.

What are most worthy of observation and remark, appear to be the different characteristics of the Greek and Latin literature, and the progress of the human mind in the three successive periods of the literary history

\* Alcibiades and Themistocles attempted to revenge themselves of their country by stirring up foreign enemies against it. But a Roman would never have been guilty of such a crime; Carthage is the only example;—he formed the plot, but could not acquire sufficient resolution to put it into practice.

of the Romans; that which precedes the reign of Augustus; that which bears the name of that emperor; and likewise the term that may be reckoned after his death till the reign of the Antonines. The two first are in some measure confounded by their dates, but are extremely different in every other respect. Although Cicero died in the reign of the triumvirate of Octavius, his genius is limited entirely to the republic: and notwithstanding Ovid, Virgil, and Horace, were born during the time of the republic, their writings bear the character of monarchical influence: and in the reign of Augustus, some authors, particularly Titus Livy, discovered very often in their historical writings, that they were republicans at heart. But to analyze with accuracy the distinctions of these three different periods, we must examine their general colorings, and not dwell upon particular exceptions.

The Roman character was never fully displayed but in the time of the republic. A nation indeed has no character, unless it is free. The aristocracy of Rome possessed some of the advantages of an aristocracy made up of enlightened characters: and though they may be justly reproached, with regard to the nomination of their senators, it being entirely hereditary; nevertheless the government of Rome, within its own walls, was free and paternal. But their conquests gave an almost unlimited power to the chiefs of the state; and the principal Romans, being freely elected by their city, which they looked upon as the queen of the universe, considered themselves as possessing the government of the world. From this aristocratical sentiment in the nobles, and the exclusive superiority in the inhabitants of the city, arose the distinguished character of the Roman writings, their language, their moral habits and their dignity.

The Romans never displayed, under any circumstances, the tokens of violent emotion: when they most desired to affect and persuade by their eloquence, they then thought it of the greatest importance to preserve that equanimity of temper and that calm dignity of manners, which are the symbols of a strong mind; that they might not bring into question those sentiments of respect, which served as the basis of their political institutions as well as of their social relations. There was in their language an authority of expression, a gravity of tone, a regularity of periods, which is seldom, if ever, acquired by the broken accents of an agitated mind, or the lively and rapid sallies of wit and gaiety. Their bravery rendered them victorious in battle; but their moral strength consisted in that profound and solemn impression which was produced by the very name of *Romans*. They never permitted themselves to be seduced by any consideration; not even a present triumph could induce them to commit an action which would in any degree be detrimental to their subordination, their respect, or their prudence.

The Romans were a people whose power consisted more in their discretion than in the impetuosity of their passions; they were easily persuaded by the voice of reason, and restrained by esteem; they were also more religious and less fanatical than the Greeks; they paid a greater attention to political authority, and not possessing an equal share of enthusiasm, they were less jealous of the reputation of individuals, and were never deprived of the exercise of their reason by any event incident to human nature.

The Romans, in the early period of their history, despised the fine arts, and literature more particularly; but when philosophers, orators, and historians rendered the talent of writing useful to the affairs and morals of the people, the Romans then were the first to engage in the pursuit of literature: their works, moreover, had that advantage over those of the Greeks, which must always arise from a practical knowledge and administration: but they were necessarily obliged to use the utmost circumspection in the composition of them.

was with the greatest timidity that Cicero first attacked the generally received ideas of the Romans: the opinions of the nation might not be set at defiance by those who wished to obtain their votes for the first places in the republic; and therefore the greatest ambition of the generality of writers was to defend and preserve the reputation of the statesmen.

In such a democracy as that which existed at Athens, the attention to political concerns, and the study of philosophy, were as rarely found united, as the man of reflection and the courtier are in a monarchy. The means by which the people acquired popularity, occupied nearly the whole of their time, and seemed to have little or no connection with the labor necessary for the increase of knowledge: the chiefs of the people had not, so to speak, the smallest idea of posterity; the storms of the then present times were so terrible, and had such an unlimited power over the posterity and adversity of every individual, that all their passions were absorbed in contemporaneous events. An aristocratical government proceeding in a slower and more measured career, excites in its subjects a more lively interest for the future: the light of philosophy is necessary to the reflection of a select society of men, while the resources of the imagination are sufficient to move an assembled multitude of the people.

With the exception of Xenophon, who himself took an active part in the military history which he related, (but who was never possessed of any power in the interior of the republic,) not one statesman of Athens was celebrated at the same period for his literary talents, or even imagined, like Cicero and Cæsar, that he could add by his writings to his political consequence. Scipio and Sallust were suspected, the one of being the concealed author of the Comedies of Terence, and the other to have been covertly engaged in the conspiracy of which he was the historian: but there is no instance, amongst the Athenians, of any individual having united the study of literature with affairs of state. The result of this nearly absolute distinction between the study of philosophy and the occupation of the statesman, was, that the Greek writers gave more latitude to their imagination; and the Latin authors regulated their ideas by the actual state of human affairs.

The Latin literature was the only one which commenced with philosophy; in every other, especially in that of the Greeks, they were entirely indebted to the imagination for the first efforts of the mind. The comedies of Plautus and of Terence are entirely the result of the ideas of the Greeks. The poets that preceded Cicero, are not worthy of being recorded, for, like Luccretius, they turned philosophy into poetry.\* The use-

\* This opinion having been called in question, I think it necessary to point out a few facts which will prove it. I have said, that the poets who preceded Cicero and Lucretius were not worthy of being recorded; an objection has been made to Ennius, Accius, and Pacuvius: Ennius, who in some respects had the advantage of the three, was incorrect, obscene, and possessed but a small share of political imagination; this opinion is grounded upon the fragments of his works, which are still extant; and it is confirmed by Virgil, whose judgment of Ennius was even proverbial. Horace, in some of his epistles, makes a jest of those who admired the ancient Roman poets, Ennius and his contemporaries. Ovid forbids the female sex to read the Annals of Ennius in verse; and, moreover, the greater number of the Latin commentators considered Ennius as a very moderate, not to say an indifferent author. I have advanced, that the Romans had philosophical writers amongst them, before they had poets; for the proof of this assertion I have the following dates: it was in the year 514 that the first comedies in verse, written by Titus Andronicus, were represented; and it was in the following year that Ennius was known; but it was two centuries before that epoch, that Numa wrote upon philosophy; and it was 150 years after Numa, that Pythagoras was received as a citizen of Rome; the philosophical sects of higher Greece had a continual connection with Rome; the Latin language borrowed many of the grammatical rules of Æolic Greece, which the colonies had transported into higher Greece. Ennius, before he attempted to compose in verse, embraced the sect of Pythagorism; and what still remains of his poems, treat more of philosophical ideas than marvelous facts. The legislation, which ought to be considered as a branch of philosophy, was carried to the greatest perfection at Rome, before they understood the meaning of a

ful was the first principle of the Latin literature; and want of amusement, that of the Greeks. The patri- cians, in condescension to the people, instituted shows, music, and festivals; but the power was wholly concentrated in the senate.

The Romans were allowed to be a celebrated nation, powerfully constituted, and wisely governed, long before the existence of any author in the Latin language. The talent of writing was not developed till a considerable time after action had had its full play; which induces a conclusion, that the Roman literature was of a quite different nature from that of a nation whose imagination was the first principle that was roused to action.

poet; public schools were instituted to study the laws, where they were analytically explained by the commentators. Sextus Porphyrius, Sextus Cælius, Granius Flaccus, &c., wrote upon this subject, in the third, fourth, and fifth centuries of the republic: to methodize the twelve tablets, some of their people were sent by the Romans to consult with the most enlightened men of Greece; and it was the decree of the twelve tablets, which united of religion and of the rights of men, both in public and in private; and they are quoted by Cicero, as superior to any the Philosophers had ever written on the subject. Paulus Emilius confided the education of his son to the philosopher Metrodon, who had accompanied him from Athens; and Cato the Elder, who disapproved of the Roman taste for Greek literature, and who expressed in the most pointed manner his contempt for Ennius, on account of his poetical talents, had himself been instructed by Nearchus, the Pythagorean, and distinguished himself both as a writer and as an orator; he entered the lists as an opponent to Carnades, a Greek philosopher of the Academic sect; and Diogenes the Stoic, who was sent to Rome at the same time with Carnades, was so kindly received by the Romans, that Scipio, Lælius, and many other senators, embraced his doctrines; it even appears that they were known and practised at Rome for a length of time before that embassy. If reference is to be obtained by the philosophy of the sophist it may with truth be said, that during the existence of the republic, the Romans constantly repulsed those false principles of the Greeks; but if we allow to philosophy the same honorable reception it met with from the ancients, we shall perceive that the Romans could not have been good statesmen, profound legislators, or great orators without philosophy. There were among the Romans many writers in prose before the time of Ennius; Posthumus Albinus wrote a history of Rome in Greek; Fabius Pictor wrote one also in Latin before Ennius was known. There were, among the Romans, many celebrated authors of whom Cicero speaks with admiration; the Gracchi and the Appii, some of whose discourses were extant in writing in the time of Cicero; in short, the republic were in possession of all the great men, before they were advanced in the cultivation of poetry. Is it possible to compare the progress of the human understanding in Rome to that which it followed in Greece? Homer, the most sublime of all poets, existed four centuries before the first composition written in prose that we are acquainted with; and Pherycles of Scyros existed 300 years before Solon, and one century before Lycurgus; when poetry, the first essay of the imagination in Greece, had attained to the highest degree of perfection, before their ideas were sufficiently enlightened upon other subjects, to establish a code of laws or form a political society. In short, to promote our desire of becoming acquainted with literature, we must attentively examine its general character. It has been said, that the Italian literature began with poetry; but in the time of Petrarch there existed several bad prosaic writers, whose names might have been objected to as well, in opposition to those of Ennius, Accius, and Pacuvius, to the great philosophers and political orators who perpetuate the glory of the first centuries of the Roman republic. If we were to recollect the great orator Cicero, only from his having attempted a poem on Moschus, in his juvenile days, it would not be understood who was meant by this appellation: it is the same with that shapeless, cold, and obscene poetry, which they desire to honor with the origin of the Latin literature. Instruction is sometimes better than erudition, because, in the right of antiquity, the imagination may easily get bewildered in the detail which will impede the progress of those who search after the truth of the whole.

The writers who were really celebrated before the century of Augustus, were Sallust, Cicero, and Lucretius; to whom may be added Plautus and Terence, who translated the Greek comedies; but it is difficult to determine the original poets in the Latin language that were deserving of any degree of fame before the time of Cicero; and likewise who is the poet that could boast of having an influence over the Latin literature before the century of Augustus, which can be in the least compared to that which Homer had over that of the Greek. Cicero was considered as being at the head of the Latin literature; as Homer was acknowledged to be of the Grecian; but with this difference, that a number of enlightened ages must have taken place before there could have existed a philosopher resembling Cicero; while it is entirely to the marvelous of the heroic age, and the imagination of the poet, that we are indebted for Homer. Should these observations be found too multiplied, I only beg it may be remembered, that they are written in answer to a charge which required to be refuted.

A greater refinement in taste, and a more accurate judgment than that possessed by the Greeks, was the natural consequence that arose from the distinction of classes at Rome. Those who were highest, ambitious to raise themselves higher, were not long in discovering that a good education and a noble deportment distinguished the different ranks in a much greater degree than the legal gradations could obtain. The Romans would never have endured on their theatres the coarse jests of Aristophanes; they would never have suffered their contemporaneous events, and their public characters, to have been thus given as a spectacle of ridicule to the public: they permitted, however, certain theatrical jests and manners to be exhibited in their presence, but without the smallest allusion to their domestic virtues. Pantomimes or farces, the subjects of which were taken from Greece, and the principal parts performed by Greek slaves, were allowed, but nothing that bore the slightest relation to the manners of the Romans. The ideas and sentiments expressed in these comedies were, in the opinion of the Roman spectators, as a fiction more than a work of imagination. Terence, however, preserved, in the use of those foreign subjects, that style of decency and restraint which are necessary to the dignity of mankind, even when there were no women amongst the auditors.

The condition of the female sex was of much more importance amongst the Romans than amongst the Greeks; but it was in their own families they obtained that ascendancy, which they had not at that time acquired in society. The taste and urbanity of the Romans was of that masculine order, which borrows nothing from the delicacy of women, but was solely maintained by their austerity of manners.

Neither the thundering eloquence of the Greeks, nor the ingenious flattery of the French, were calculated for an aristocratical government; it is neither the individual person of the king, nor the people at large, whose esteem it is the most essential to cultivate; but that of a small body of men who unite in common their separate interest. In this order of things, it behoved the patricians mutually to respect each other, in order to command the esteem of the nation at large: they must also apply themselves to obtain a solid and lasting reputation: their qualifications must be solemn and grave, but at the same time such as might reflect honor on each individual of their number, and tend to the support of each separate existence equally with their own. Whatever is singular, or excites too large a share of applause or envy, is not suitable to the dignity of an august body of men. The Romans were not ambitious to distinguish themselves, like the Greeks, by extraordinary systems and useless sophisms, or by a manner of living fantastically philosophical.\* What was most calculated to obtain the esteem of the patricians, was the object of general emulation; they might hate them, but they nevertheless wished to imitate them. Although the Romans attended less to literary pursuits than the Greeks, they were considered superior to them in their wisdom, and the extent of their moral and philosophical observations: besides, the Romans had the advantage of some centuries over the Greeks in the progress of the human understanding.

A democracy inspires a lively and almost universal emulation; but an aristocracy excites to the perfection of what it has begun. The writer who composes, ought ever to have the judges of his performance present to his imagination; that his works will then combine the genius of the author, and the knowledge of the public, which he was selected for his tribunal.

The Greeks had infinitely more practice than the Romans in smart and prompt repartees, which could not

fail to insure popularity in the midst of a sprightly and witty nation: but the Romans had evidently the advantage of possessing real judgment: there was, consequently, a closer connection in their ideas, which laid them to examine with greater minuteness every species of reflection: and their advancement in philosophy is very apparent, from the era of Cicero to that of Tacitus. The literature of the imagination proceeded with a rapid but an unequal step; while the knowledge of the human heart, and the morals annexed to it, came by degrees to perfection. The principal foundation of the Roman philosophy was borrowed from the Greeks: but as the Romans adopted in their conduct in life, the principles of morality which the Greeks had only developed in their writings, the exercise of virtue rendered them greatly their superior. Every thing which relates to the code of moral duties, is explained by Cicero with more energy, more clearness, and greater force, than by any other who preceded him it was impossible to advance farther in the establishment of a beneficent religion, or in the abolishment of slavery, both political and civil.

The ancients did not investigate so deeply into the extent of the human passions, as some of the modern moralists have done: their ideas of virtue were in opposition to this examination. Virtue, with the ancients, consisted chiefly in the command they acquired over themselves, and the love of fame; which being more external than internal, did not permit an inquiry into the secrets of the heart, and therefore moral philosophy lost much in many respects.

The opinion of the Stoics was the point of honor with the ancients. A predominant virtue sustains every political association independent of their principles of government; that is to say, amongst all the different qualifications one must be preferred: unless this were the case, the others would lose their effect; but this one alone can supply the absence of all the rest; this quality is the tie, the distinguished character which unites citizens of the same country.

The predominant trait in the character of the Lacedæmonians, was the contempt in which they held bodily pain; that of the Athenians was the distinction of talents; that of the Romans was the conquest of the mind over itself; and that of the French was the splendid display of their valor: and so great was the importance which a Roman attached to the exercise of an absolute command over himself, that, when alone, he would scarcely allow even to himself that he possessed those affections which he was expected to suppress. If the least apprehension of weakness at any time rendered him likely to betray it, he repulsed it with so much energy, that he did not indulge his inclination with sufficient latitude to investigate the private emotions of his own heart. It was much the same with the Roman philosophers; the tumultuous sensations of grief, anger, envy, or regret, and every involuntary feeling of the soul, were considered as effeminate; and they would have blushed even to have been suspected of approving of them; they had no desire to study them, either in their own case or that of others. Extremely ambitious of fame, they gave no latitude to their natural character; that which appeared, was altogether artificial: nevertheless, the Romans were not hypocrites by nature, but they acquired that appearance from ostentation.

Cicero is the only philosopher whose real character was evidently portrayed throughout his writings; and yet he brought his systems to oppose what his self-love had suffered to escape from him; and his philosophy was entirely composed of precepts without observations. Cicero, in his *Offices*, speaks of decorum, that is, of exterior forms of virtue, as if it was a part of virtue itself; they taught as a moral duty, the several different methods of imposing respect, by purity of language, by elegance of pronunciation: in short, ever

\* What would the Romans have said to the singularities of *Diogenes*? Why, nothing at all; for he never would have commended them in a country where they would not have been successful in procuring him a reputation.

circumstance that could add to the dignity of man, was esteemed a virtue with the Romans. It was philosophical enjoyments and not the consolatory ideas of a sublime and elevated religion, which the Romans proposed as a recompense for their sacrifices. It was not to the consolations of the heart that they appealed to sustain the man; but to his pride. The more their nature resembled the *majestic*, the greater care was taken to banish from the mind even the smallest emotion of sensibility, had it even been the sole support of their severest morals.

It does not appear, that in the first epoch of their literature there was any work which discovered a profound knowledge of the human heart, the secret springs which actuate characters, or the numberless diversities of the moral nature. To have investigated the cause of those involuntary sensations of the heart, would have been probably an encouragement to them, whilst the Romans wished to remain ignorant even of the possibility of their existence. Their eloquence, singly considered, did not possess that irresistible emotion; it was the light and strength of reason, which never interrupted the tranquillity of the mind. The Romans were, nevertheless, possessed of more real sensibility than the Greeks; that austerity of manners which they imposed upon themselves, was a better preservative to the affections, than that licentiousness to which the Greeks abandoned themselves.

Plutarch relates that Brutus, when about to quit Italy, and just ready to embark, walked by the sea-side with Portia, whom he was going to leave; they entered into one of the temples, and addressed their prayers to the gods of protection; when a painting, which represented the parting scene of Hector and Andromache, caught their attention. Cato's daughter, who, till that moment, had supported herself with the greatest heroism, could no longer suppress the violence of her grief. Brutus, moved to pity by her tears, led her to some friends who had accompanied them, saying, 'I trust to your care this woman, who unites to every virtue peculiar to her own sex, the intrepidity of ours.' And with these expressive words he went his way.

I know not whether our civil commotions, in which the tender farewells of so many friends have proved their last, have added to the impression I felt in reading this recital; but it appears to me, that there are few more affecting: it is also true, that the austerity of the Roman character gives a more brilliant coloring to the feelings it excites. The stoic Brutus, whose rigid virtue never condescended to pity, showed, in his last days, and even in those moments which preceded his latest efforts, a sentiment so tender, that it surprises the heart with an unexpected emotion: the dreadful action and fatal destiny of this last of the Romans, encompass his image with ideas so melancholy which excite a sympathetic concern for the fate of Portia.\*

Compare this affecting scene with that of Pericles, pleading before the Areopagus for the accused Aspasia: the splendor of power, the lustre of beauty, and even love itself, such as could be excited by seduction, were all found united in this pleader: and yet they do not penetrate to the heart. The sources of tenderness are also to be found in the secrets of conscience: neither the prejudices of society, nor the opinions of philosophers, can dispose of the affections of the heart: but virtue, such as it was given by heaven, and whether it is in love or in the sacrifice of the affections, is ever delicate and equally consistent.

Although the Romans, from the purity of their morals and the progress of their understanding, were better qualified for deep and lasting affections than the Greeks; yet it was not till the reign of Augustus that we could perceive any traces, either in ideas or expres-

sions, of that sensibility which those affections ought to have created. The habit of never suffering any personal impressions to appear, and their attention being chiefly engrossed by philosophy, gave an energy to their style; but it was sometimes productive of an unpleasant dryness and irregularity. 'As to the sentiment vulgarly termed love,' says Cicero, 'it is almost superfluous to attempt to demonstrate how much it is beneath the character of man.' He likewise declares, that the tears shed over the tombs of departed friends, and all testimonies of grief, are 'supportable only in women:' and he also adds, that 'they are a bad omen.' Thus was the man who wished to subdue human nature, himself the victim of superstition.

Without endeavoring to discuss the advantages which might result to a nation of such moral strength, and exalted by the united efforts of institutions and manners; I am certain that literature must have less variety when the genius of each man has its path marked out by the national spirit, and the exertions of each individual tend to one single point of perfection, instead of being directed to that for which his natural talents are best adapted.

The battles of the gladiators had for their object, strongly to impress the minds of the people with the representations of war, and the spectacle of death; but the Romans also required, that those unfortunate beings, whom fate had placed in their hands, the slaves of their barbarous amusement, should learn, in the practice of those sanguinary games, to triumph over pain: and they never omitted an occasion to put them to the proof. This continual subjection of their finer feelings was not favorable to the effect of tragedy, neither does the Latin literature contain any thing celebrated in that style.\*

The Roman character possessed in a high degree the grandeur of tragedy; but it was too general to be theatrical: even the lowest classes of the people were distinguished by a certain dignity and gravity of manners. But in that derangement occasioned by misfortune, that cruel picture of physical nature torn and wrecked by the sufferings of the mind, and from which idea Shakespeare drew such heart-rending scenes, the Romans would have discovered nothing but the degradation of the human species. There is no instance, in their history, of any man or woman whose intellects were deranged by disappointment in any shape: nevertheless, suicide was very frequent amongst them, although the exterior signs of grief were rarely to be met with. The contempt which the language of complaint was sure to excite, imposed it as a law to conquer such weakness or to die. There is nothing in such a disposition that can furnish any great development of tragedy, neither would it have been possible to have transported into Rome that interest which the Greeks felt in their theatrical compositions on national subjects.† The Romans would not have permitted, on their stage, any representations which had the smallest allusion to their history, their affections, or their country: a religious sentiment, was what the Romans esteemed above all things. The Athenians believed in the same religious dogmas as the Romans, and like them defended their country, and like them were fond of liberty; but that respect which acts upon the thoughts, and drives from the imagination even the probability of committing a prohibited action, was known only to the Romans. At Athens, philosophy was cultivated as one of the fine arts by their people, enamored of every species of celebrity: but at

\* Horace complains, that often, in the midst of a representation, the Romans interrupted the performance by vociferations for the gladiators.

† There still exists one tragedy composed upon a Roman subject, entitled the Death of Octavius; but it was written, as the nature of the events will prove, some length of time after the destruction of the republic; and although it is inserted in the works of Seneca, we are ignorant of the author of it, nor is it clearly ascertained if it was ever represented.

\* *Elle vint sur ce seuil accompagner ses pas,  
Et ses infortunés ne se revirent pas.  
[Les Gracques, par M. de Guibert.]*



Rome it was adopted as the support of virtue; the statesmen studied it as a means of enabling them to form a better code of laws; for the aggrandizement of the Roman republic was the sole object to which their labors and their ambition tended, and reflected more glory upon their warriors, their magistrates, and their writers, than all the honors which could have been individually conferred upon them. The same spirit and the same character, arising from the same cause, shone through the literature of the Roman republic; it is by the perfection and not by the variety, the dignity, and not by the ardor, and by the wisdom more than the invention, that the writings of those days were remarkable. There reigned throughout an authority of expression, a majesty of character, that commands respect, and assures the full acceptance of every word; but so far is it from suppressing or retrenching any part of the signification, that each term, on the contrary, seems to suppose more than it expresses. The Romans gave a great scope to the development of their ideas; but what belongs to their sentiments, is always expressed in a concise manner.

The first epoch of the Latin literature approaches so near to the close of the Greeks, that it is subject to the same imperfections, arising from a similar cause, namely, the infancy of civilization; many of their works were pregnant with errors, which evinced their profound ignorance of the subject they attempted to delineate; while others were extended to an insupportable length. The Romans were nevertheless superior to the Greeks in the connection of their ideas; but in this respect how much inferior are they to the moderns.

What most excites our admiration in perusing the smaller number of writings which remain of the epoch of the Roman literature, is the idea which such compositions afford us of their character and government. The history of Sallust, the letters of Brutus,\* and the works of Cicero, are recalled most powerfully to the remembrance: we feel the strength of mind through the beauty of the style; we discover the man in the author, the nation in the man, and the universe at the feet of the nation. Neither Sallust nor Cicero were the greatest characters of the age in which they lived; but writers that possessed such extraordinary talents, must necessarily imbibe the spirit and beauties of so fine a century, and Rome lives in their writings. When Cicero pleads before the people, or the senate, or the priests, or before Cæsar, his eloquence changes its character; in his harangues may be observed, not only that style which was suitable to the Roman nation in general; but all his discourses were addressed and modified to the different tastes and habits of each.

The parallel which may be drawn between Cicero and Demosthenes, is most apparent in the comparison which may be made between the spirit and customs of the Greeks, and those of the Romans: in comparing the ingenious humor of Demosthenes with the prevailing eloquence of Cicero, and the means employed by Demosthenes to move the passions which he stands in need of, with the arguments which Cicero uses to repel those he wishes to oppose; his long developments, and the rapid impulse of the Greek orator, are all closely connected with the government and national character of the two people.

A private writer is absorbed in his own talents; but an orator who wishes to influence political deliberations, conforms with care to the national spirit, as an able general previously surveys the ground on which he is to give battle.

\* Brutus, in his letters, does not confine himself to the art of writing; his aim was to be useful to the political interests of his country; and yet the letter which he addressed to Cicero, to reproach him for flattering the young Octavius, was perhaps one of the finest prose compositions ever written in the Latin language.

## CHAPTER VI.

## OF THE LATIN LITERATURE DURING THE REIGN OF AUGUSTUS.

Cicero and Virgil are generally considered as belonging to that century called the golden age of the Latin literature; but those writers whose genius and talents aimed at perfection in the midst of such furious struggles for liberty, should be distinguished by another character from those whose abilities were ripened in the last years of the peaceable despotism of Augustus: but those periods approached so near to each other, that their dates might be confounded, were it not that the general spirit of their literature, before and after the loss of their liberty, presents to the eye of observation a most striking difference.

Many of the republican customs were continued from habit for some years after the reign of Augustus, the proofs of which are visible in many of their historical writers; but were all recalled by the influence of the court, the greater part of which desiring to please Augustus, and being situated near him, gave to their writings that turn of character that must be assumed under the reign of a monarch who wishes to conciliate the good opinion of the people without diminishing in any degree the power he is possessed of. This is the only point of analogy which establishes the least relation between the Latin literature and that of the French in the reign of Louis XIV.; in other respects, these different periods bear not the least resemblance to each other.

Philosophy, in Rome, preceded poetry: this was inverting the common order of things, and was possibly the principal cause of the perfection of the Latin poets. Emulation was not carried to poetry till the reign of Augustus. The enjoyment of power and of political interest was generally preferred to any success that might arise purely from literature; and when, by the form of government, men of superior talents were called upon to the exercise of public occupations, it was towards eloquence, history, and philosophy, and to that species of literature which leads more immediately to the knowledge of men and events, that their labors were directed. But under the dominion of an empire it is quite the reverse; and the only means left, by which men of distinguished talents can acquire fame, is in the exercise of the fine arts: and if their tyranny should be tempered with lenity, the poets are, in general, too much inclined to illustrate the reign by their masterly pieces of adulation. Nevertheless, Virgil, Horace, and Ovid, though they were all prodigal of their flattery to Augustus; yet their writing discovered more philosophy and reflection than any other of the Latin poets: they were indebted for this advantage in part to the sound sense and solid judgment of the writers who preceded them. Every era of literature has its epoch of poetry; the beauties of imagery and of harmony have been successively transplanted into many different and reformed languages; but when the poetical talent of a nation unfolds itself as it did at Rome, in the middle of an enlightened century, it is enriched by its knowledge and experience.

The poets, in the reign of Augustus, adopted in most of their compositions the Epicurean system; which is favorable to poetry, and appears to give a degree of consequence to indolence, a luxury to philosophy, and in a manner to dignify even slavery. This system, is immoral, but it is not servile: it gives up liberty like every other good that requires any effort to keep possession of; but it does not make despotism a principle, nor obedience to resemble fanaticism, as the flatterers of Louis XIV. were desirous of doing. The idea of death, which Horace constantly intermixed with the most smiling images, established a kind



of philosophical equality by the side of flattery ; but it was not from a virtuous sensibility that the poets portrayed the brevity of existence and the certain destiny of man : if they had been really capable of profound reflection, they would rather have opposed the tyranny than have celebrated the usurper. But life thus passed, is but a representation of the smooth gliding streams that refreshed their burning climate, and we are almost inclined to forgive their omission of morals and of liberty, when we see them inattentive to time and existence.

But notwithstanding the great effeminacy of character so remarkably prevalent in most of the poets during the reign of Augustus, there are found in them a number of reflected beauties : they borrowed from the Greeks great part of their poetical inventions, which the moderns have imitated in their turn : and it seems as if they would ever remain the standard of the art. But whatever is tender or philosophical in the Latin poets, may be ascribed entirely to themselves.

The love of a pastoral life, which inspired so many beautiful ideas, assumes a different character with the Romans, to that which was understood by the Greeks : these nations were both equally pleased with the same imagery, which was suitable to a similar climate. They each invoked the freshness bestowed by nature, and welcomed with delight the shade that screened them from a vertical sun : but the Romans required, to heighten the charms of rural life, a shelter that could defend them from tyranny ; they retired from the bustle of inhabited cities, to repose their minds after the painful emotions they had been subjected to, and to lose sight, if possible, of the yoke which goaded and degraded them. Such a measure was favorable to moral reflections : they were interspersed with their descriptive poetry ; and we imagine we perceive a tender regret, and a melancholy remembrance in all the compositions of that period. This circumstance, without doubt, is the cause why we feel a greater degree of interest for the Romans than for the Greeks. The Greeks lived as it were with futurity in view ; but the Romans, like us, loved to carry their reflections to the past. As long as the republic existed, the Romans discovered a delicacy in their affection for the female sex : they had not, it is true, that independent spirit which is rendered permanent by the modern laws : but secluded, with their household gods, they breathed, like domestic divinities, certain religious sentiments. Those writers who existed in the period of the republic, never allowed themselves to express the affections which they felt : it was in that short interval betwixt the most rigid austerity of manners and the greatest degree of depravity, that the Latin poets showed a more tender sentiment than any we meet with in the Greek writings. In the reign of Augustus, they recollected the republican severity ; and their portraits of love were indebted for a few charms to a virtuous retrospect.\*

\* I cite at hazard two examples, to substantiate what I have advanced concerning the sensibility of the Latin poets. When the travelling gods, in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, demanded of Philemon, what Baucis and himself would most desire from the favor of heaven ? Philemon answered :—

Poscimus ; et quoniam concordæ egimus annos,  
Aberat hora duos eadem, nec conjugis unquam  
Busta mea videam, neu sim tumulandus ab illâ

‘As we have lived together many years in perfect harmony, we only ask that the same hour should terminate our existence ; that I may not behold the tomb of my spouse, nor she be left to sorrow after me.’

I have selected from Virgil, the poet in whose verses is found the utmost sensibility, especially those in which paternal tenderness is so forcibly described, to cause that deep affection in the mind, without making use of the language of love, requires a much greater fund of sensibility. Evander on taking leave of his son *Pallas*, when he was preparing for battle, addressed *Æneas* in these words :

The verses of Tibullus to Delia, the fourth book of the *Æneid*, Ceyx and Alcyone, Baucis and Philemon, give a true description of the sentiments of the heart in the Latin language : their sublime and soft character inspires a great degree of respect ; such an impression is created from this language which that of reason only would not be capable of producing with all its strength when employed in the expression of tenderness. True and genuine sensibility is, however, rarely to be met with during the reign of Augustus ; the Epicurean system, the doctrine of fatality, and the manners and customs of antiquity before the establishment of the Christian religion and almost entirely in opposition to nature and the effusions of the heart.

Ovid, in many of his compositions, introduced a portion of affectation and antithesis in his language of love, which destroyed even the shadow of truth : such was also the vitiated taste of the age of Louis XIV. This mode of writing with cool deliberation on the passions and affections of the heart, must at all times and in all climates have nearly the same effect upon the readers : but Ovid's affectation was the error of his imagination, and in no degree connected with the general character of antiquity.

The comparison has been so often drawn between the age of Louis XIV. and that of Augustus, that it is needless, as it is impossible, for me to enter upon it here : I shall therefore confine myself to the development of one single observation, which is of the greatest importance to the system of perfectibility, which it is my desire to support. Descartes, Boyle, Pascal, Moliere, Labruyere, Bossuet, and the English philosophers, who were contemporaries at one period of his history of letters, do not admit of any comparison between the century of Louis XIV. in the advance of the progress of the human understanding. Nevertheless, we are tempted to inquire why amongst the ancients, and more especially amongst the Romans, there were found historians so correct, as never to have been equaled by the moderns ; and particularly, why the French cannot furnish a single work of this description which is complete.

In the chapter which treats of the age of Louis XIV., I shall analyze the cause whence arises the mediocrity of the French historians : but I ought previously to make some reflections on the superiority of the ancients in history ; and I am persuaded those reflections will prove, that their superiority was not unfavorable to the successive progress of their understanding. There exist some histories, which may justly be entitled philosophical : and there are others whose sole merit consists in the variety and animated style of their representations, and the energy and beauty of their language : it was in the latter period that the Greek and Latin historians were illustrious.

At vos, O superi, et divum tu maxime rector  
Jupiter, Arcadii quasso miserescite regis ;  
Et patrias audite preces, si numina vestra  
Incolumen Pallanta mihi, si fata reservant ;  
Si visurus eum vivo, et venturus in unum ;  
Vitam oro ; patiar quævis durare laborem.  
Sin aliquem infandum casum, Fortuna, minaris ;  
Nunc o, nunc liceat crudelem abruptum vitam ;  
Dum curæ ambiguis, dum spes incerta futuri  
Dum te care puer, mea sera et sola voluptas,  
Complexu teneo ; graviore nuncius aures  
Vulneret.—

‘Ye gods ! and mighty Jove, in pity bring  
Relief, and hear a father and a king,  
If fate and you reserve these eyes to see  
My son return with peace and victory ;  
If the lov'd boy shall bless his father's sight ;  
If we shall meet again with more delight ;  
Then draw my life in length, let me sustain,  
In hopes of his embrace, the worst of pain.  
But if your hard decrees, which, O ! I dread,  
Have doom'd to death this undeserving head ;  
This, O ! this very moment, let me die,  
While hopes and fears in equal balance lie ;  
While yet possess'd of all his youthful charms,  
I strain him close within these aged arms ;  
Before that fatal news my soul shall wound.’

A much more profound knowledge of mankind is necessary in order to become a great moralist, than what is required to be a good historian. Tacitus is the only writer of antiquity who united those qualities; the apprehension and sufferings which are always attached to servitude, ripened his reflection, and his experience was the result of extended observation. Titus Livy, Sallust, and the historians of an inferior order, Florus, Cornelius Nepos, &c., delight us by the grandeur and elegance of their recitals, by the beauty and eloquence of the harangues which they give to their characters, and by the dramatic interests which they knew how to afford to their representations. But those historians portrayed, as it may be said, nothing more than the mere externals of life; describing man such as he appears, in the light he wishes to display himself. Their coloring was strong, and finely contrasted with virtue and vice: but we do not find in the ancient history either a philosophical analysis of moral impressions, or a profound observation of characters. Montaigne, in his intellectual review, penetrates much farther into that subject, than any other ancient author. But this kind of superiority is not desirable in an historian: mankind must be represented at large; their grandeur of character must be left to the heroes, that they may appear great to the subsequent ages. The moralist may discover the foibles which are the hidden resemblances of one man to another; but the historian must be positive in pronouncing the difference.

The ancients delighted in what excited admiration, and were possessed of a quality which was as necessary to the interest of truth as to that of fiction; namely, they were as unbiassed in their contempt, as they were in their enthusiasm; they neither endeavored to diminish the odiousness of vice, nor to exalt the merit of virtue: and we often find characters much better supported in their history than in their works of imagination. Besides, is it possible to forget the astonishing advantage the ancient historians possessed over the moderns, even from the facts which they recited! A republican government produces a dignity of character in men as well as in events: while a despotic monarchical government, or the history of federal laws, can never inspire so much interests as the annals of a free people.

Suetonius, who was the historian of the reign of the emperors, Ammianus, Marcellinus, and Velleius Paterculus, could not have been compared, in the latter part of his writings, to any of those who wrote in the centuries of the republic; and if Tacitus surpassed his contemporaries, it was because he still cherished the republican resentment; and not considering the government of the emperors as legal, nor requiring the permission of any one to publish his works, his spirit was not subdued by prejudices, either natural or insisted on, which has enslaved our modern historians down to the present century.

Numerous are the considerations to which we are to attribute the superiority of the ancients in historical writings. One chief advantage arose from their peculiar art of describing and relating what they conceived to be the emotions, the interest, and the effects of the imagination, but not from any secret knowledge of the human heart, or the philosophical course of events. It was not likely that the ancients should have possessed this knowledge in an equal degree with those whom the lapse of centuries and multiplied generations have instructed by new examples, and who are inclined to contemplate, in a review of past history, so many crimes, misfortunes, and sufferings.

#### CHAPTER VII.

OF THE LATIN LITERATURE, FROM THE DEATH OF AUGUSTUS DOWN TO THE REIGN OF THE ANTONINES.

After the age of Louis XIV., and during that of  
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Louis XV., an advanced progress was visible in philosophy, without either poetry or literature having acquired any greater degree of perfection. Nearly the same advancement in the arts may be observed from the period of Augustus to that of Antonines; but with this difference, that the emperors who reigned during that interval were such atrocious monsters, that the empire, unable to support itself against despotic tyranny, sunk under its influence; and the general spirit of the nation being thus broken, there was but a very small number of men who retained sufficient strength of mind to devote themselves to study.

The minds of men, enervated by that inglorious ease in which they indulged themselves in the reign of Augustus, lost even the remembrance of those heroic virtues to which Rome was indebted for her grandeur. Horace blushed not to avow in his verses, that he fled on the day of battle; and Cicero and Ovid both testified the greatest impatience at their exile, although there is the most striking difference in their manner of expressing it. The *De Tristibus* of Ovid are filled with the repinings of despondency, and the most servile flattery of his prosecutor; while Cicero, even in his familiar correspondence with Atticus, contrived to ennoble, by a thousand different methods, the grief he felt at his unjust banishment. The variation in their sensations and in their expression is not to be attributed entirely to the dissimilarity of their character, but to the different periods in which they lived. General opinion may be considered as the centre by which men are united: and if it does not change the character, it in some degree modifies the forms in which men chose to appear before the multitude.

After the flourishing reign of Augustus, there arose a more barbarous and oppressive tyranny, of which antiquity does not furnish a second example. Excess of misfortune had in a great measure broken the spirit of the nation; and the slothful indolence into which they had degenerated since the overthrow of the republic, enervated alike superior minds with those of the vulgar; while the horrid cruelties which were continually practised upon them, rendered the lower classes of the people still more servile and contemptible:—but in the midst of these dreadful calamities, a small number of enlightened men arose above the general despondency, and experienced more strongly the necessity of a social philosophy.

Seneca (of whom I shall only here form a judgment by his works,) Tacitus, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius, although in different situations, and with characters which bore not the least resemblance to each other, were all inspired with the same abhorrence of guilt and indignation against vice: their writings in both the Greek and Latin language are composed of a character totally different from the literature of the period of Augustus; they even possessed more force and energy than was to be found in the republican philosophers themselves. The morals of Cicero are principally directed to the effect they ought to produce on others; and those of Seneca express the self-command we should endeavor to acquire: the one seeks an honorable power; the other, an asylum to shelter him from affliction: the one wishes to support and animate virtue; the other, to inspire a contempt of vice. Cicero considers men only as they are connected with his country; while Seneca, who had no country, was engrossed entirely with what related to private individuals. There is a certain vein of melancholy which prevails throughout the works of Seneca; while those of Cicero are filled with energy and emulation.

When despotic tyrants menaced destruction, and philosophers were condemned like the most atrocious criminals, to suffer an ignominious death; men, not daring to act openly, retired within themselves, and devoted their time to a more minute investigation of the mind. Yet the writers of the third epoch of the

Latin literature had not arrived at that perfect knowledge and philosophical observation of general characters which we find in Montaigne and La Bruyère; but they acquired a more intimate acquaintance with themselves; and their genius was confined by oppression to repose in their own bosoms.

Tyranny, like other public calamities, may assist the development of philosophy; but it is very destructive to literature, by suppressing emulation and corrupting the taste.

It has been maintained, that the decline of the arts, of letters, and of empires, must necessarily happen after they have arrived at a certain degree of splendor: but this idea is not just; for though I firmly believe that the arts have their limits, above which they are incapable of rising; it is however very possible they may remain at the same height without any retrogression:—and in every species of progressive knowledge, the moral nature ever tends to perfect itself. Precedent melioration is a cause of future melioration: the link of connection may be broken by accidental occurrences, which may impede future progress, but which can by no means be considered as any consequence of prior advancement.

Notwithstanding the dreadful nature of the circumstances the writers had to contend with in the period of the Emperors, they were much superior in philosophy to the writers of the age of Augustus: but the style of the Latin authors, in the third epoch of their literature, possessed much less elegance and purity: it was impossible that, under such rude and ferocious tyrants, they could preserve a delicacy of taste and expression. The multitude were rendered contemptible by a servile imitation of the manners of the reigning tyrant; while the smaller number of distinguished men found so much difficulty in communicating their ideas to each other, that it was impracticable for them to establish that critical, that literary legislation, which draws a positive line between that which is studied and that which is genuine, and marks likewise the difference between energy and exaggeration.

Under the tyranny of the Emperors it was not permitted, nor would it have been possible, to have moved the people by eloquence; neither philosophical nor literary labors tended in the least degree to influence public events: nor can we discover, in any of the writings of that period, such a character as is marked by the desire of being useful, or any measure for determining particular actions, or for inspiring by words an actual and positive result. Amusement must be afforded to the mind, in order to induce men who are separated from each other to literary pursuits, whose ambition is dormant, and who expect nothing from reflection. It is very probable, in such a situation, for the writers to be guilty of affectation; because it is of the utmost importance to them, to render the form of their style attractive and pleasing. Seneca, and particularly Pliny the Younger, are not entirely free from that foible. It is also pretty certain that, like Juvenal, they might have vitiated their taste by their different modes of trial to inspire the horror of vice in a people who were hardened by the repetition of crimes; and the sentiments of authors were so depraved by the predominant manners of the times, that they could not retain that purity of expression which requires greater force when employed in pointing out the most disgusting images. But those errors which cannot be denied, ought not to preclude us from acknowledging that the third epoch of the Roman literature was more celebrated for men of profound genius, judgment, and solid understanding, than any other which preceded it. The ideas of Quintilian, in his treatise upon the art of rhetoric, are certainly more novel and refined than any which are to be found in the writings of Cicero on the same subject. Quintilian united his sentiments with those of Cicero, and took his departure from the point Cicero

relinquished. The philosophy of Seneca penetrates deeply into the human heart. Pliny the Elder is, of all the writers of antiquity, the one who approaches the nearest to truth in the sciences. Tacitus, in every respect, has an unlimited preference over the greatest Latin historians.

The first authors who wrote and comprehended superior language, were enraptured by the harmony of phrases; and neither Cicero himself, nor his auditors, felt at that time the want of a style more energetic than that which was furnished by their own ideas. But as they advanced in literature, their taste for the simple pleasures of imagination lessened by degrees, and the mind became more diligent in the search of abstract ideas. The intercourse between mankind increased with the progress of ages; their conceptions were better regulated, and a variety of circumstances produced new discoveries and combinations: thus, reflection may be pronounced the successor of time. It is this progressive style which is visible in the last epoch of the Latin literature, notwithstanding the local difficulties which at that time impeded the advancement of the human understanding.

During the tragical reign of the Emperors, it must be said, to the honor of the Romans, that most of the efforts of imagination sunk into oblivion. Lucan wrote but to revive the remembrance of the republic; and his death sufficiently attests the peril which attended the arduous task. It was in vain that the ferocious Emperors of Rome testified the greatest partiality for public amusements; not one theatrical production, worthy of any continued success, appeared during their reign; not one poetical essay remains, to remind us of the disgraceful leisure of servitude: the men of letters did not at that period so far degrade their talents, as to employ them in the decoration of tyranny; their sole occupation was the study of philosophy and eloquence,—weapons calculated to overthrow even oppression itself.

Flattery has tarnished the writings of some philosophers of that period, and their rhetorical figures were disgraceful: nevertheless, the art of printing being then unknown was a circumstance, in some respects, favorable to the freedom of the pen; despotism was less watchful over composition, when the means of publishing were so extremely limited. Polemical writings, as well as those which influence temporary opinions and contemporaneous events, could be of no service; neither could they have any power before the use of the press was discovered; as they could never be sufficiently diffused to produce any popular effect: the tribune alone could accomplish this point; but composition then confined itself to works upon general ideas, or anterior facts instructive to succeeding generations. Tyrants at that period were much less solicitous as to the liberty of the pen, than they are at the present era; posterity not being under their jurisdiction, they willingly left it to the philosophers.

We are ready to inquire, how it happened that, at this period, none of the Romans devoted themselves to the study of the sciences? It has frequently occurred, that, under the yoke of tyranny, men of superior acquirements were unwilling to render themselves contemptible; but as they did not wish to revolt, they were employed in independent researches. But it may be apprehended, that the dangers which at the time threatened men of great talents, were too imminent to leave them sufficient leisure for the exercise and labors of genius. It is also possible that the Romans retained such a portion of republican indignation, as to withdraw entirely their attention from the destiny of their country. Philosophy calls forth the energies of the soul; while the sciences transport the ideas into quite a different channel. In short, at that period they had not discovered the best method of pursuit in the study of natural philosophy; neither were they excited by emu-

lation to proceed with vigor, where no great success had as yet been obtained.

One of the principal causes of the destruction of the empires of antiquity, was their ignorance of several important discoveries in the sciences : which event established more equality between men and nations. The decline of empires is no more in the natural order of events, than that of letters and of knowledge. But before the civilization of Europe, before the political and military systems and the use of gunpowder, had placed nations nearer on an equality, and, in short, previous to the establishment of the art of printing, national spirit and national knowledge must of course have been victims to the barbarians, who were certainly more skilful as warriors, than other men. However, had the press existed, the acquirements and opinions of the people would daily have increased in strength, and the Roman character would have been preserved, and with it, the republic would have continued its superiority : we should not then have witnessed the banishment of a people who were fond of liberty without subordination, and glory divested of jealousy ; a people who, instead of requiring that men should degrade themselves to obtain their favor, had raised their ideas to the true appreciation of virtues and talents, in order to honor them with their esteem ; a people, whose admiration was directed by their judgment, but in whom judgment was never biased by their admiration.

The genius of mankind, and above all, patriotism, would be entirely discouraged, if it could be proved that there was a moral necessity for the greatest nations to be eclipsed after having enlightened the world for a certain length of time. But this succession of dethroned people is not an inevitable fatality. If we study the sublime reflections of Montesquieu on the causes of the decline of the Romans, we shall clearly perceive that the greatest part of those causes do not exist in the present days. The part of Europe which was not included in the civilization, was likely to invade the one less enlightened ; for nature always inclines towards equality : and it was therefore absolutely necessary that the advantages of society should be universal ; that the diffusion of knowledge, the charms of a domestic life, and also commercial relations, by establishing more purity in their enjoyments, should appease by degrees the rivalry of nations.

The crimes scarcely to be credited, of which the Roman empire was the theatre, was one of the principal causes of their fall ; the disorderly lives they led, and the discrepancy of public opinions, could alone have permitted such horrible excesses.\* If we except the reign of terror in France, atrocity is neither inherent in the nature or the manners of Europeans in the present era. The state of slavery, which exempted one class of men from the performance of any moral duty ; the small supply of means which could promote general instruction ; the diversity of philosophical sects, which threw the minds of men into incertitude with respect to what was just or unjust ; the indifference relative to suffering and death, an indifference which owed its birth to courage, but which terminated by exhausting the natural sources of sympathy ;—these were the several sources of that savage cruelty which existed among the Romans.

A disgusting depravity, which alike infringed upon nature and morality, completed the degradation of a people once so great ; and their debasement prepared an easy triumph for the Northern people. The civil-

\* When Caligula went to make war in Britany, he sent Protenus to the Senate : Scribonius, a senator, approached him with the intention of addressing him in some phrase of salutation upon his arrival ; when Protenus, raising his voice, said, " Is it possible that an enemy of the Emperors can allow himself to pay a compliment to me ? " The senators, who heard these words, immediately seized Scribonius, and as they were unarmed, they massacred him with their penknives. This trait certainly supersedes any instance of base intrepidity related in modern history.

ization of Europe, the establishment of the Christian religion, the discovery of the sciences, and the diffusion of knowledge, were as so many bulwarks against depravation, and destroyed the ancient causes of barbarity : therefore the fall of nations, and in consequence that of letters, is now much less to be apprehended ;—a truth which I hope the following chapter will more clearly demonstrate.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE INVASION OF THE PEOPLE OF THE NORTH ; THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION ; AND THE REVIVAL OF LETTERS.

We may reckon in history a lapse of more than ten centuries, during which it is generally that the human understanding has been on the decline. It certainly would be a great objection to the system of progressive knowledge, that such a long course of years, so considerable a portion of the times with which we are acquainted, should have rolled along, and yet the important work of *perfectability* should have recoiled from the grasp of each ardent pursuers : but this objection, which I should regard as irrefragable, if it had any foundation in truth, I can confute in a very simple and satisfactory manner. I do not conceive that the human species have retrograded during this epoch ; on the contrary, it is admitted that, in the course of the above ten centuries, great efforts have been made in the propagation of knowledge, as well as in the development of the intellectual faculties.

We are convinced, by the study of history, that all principal events tend towards the same end, namely, the civilization of the world. In each century, we perceive new classes of people admitted to the benefits of social order ; and even war, notwithstanding its cruel disasters, has been known to extend the empire of knowledge.

The Romans civilized the people whom they conquered ; but they were indebted to Greece for the first ray of light, which appeared as a small brilliant speck in the midst of a region of darkness. Some centuries after, a warlike people united under the same laws a part of the world, in order to civilize it, which they had first won by conquest. The people of the north, although they banished for a time the arts and literature which flourished in the east, nevertheless acquired a share of the knowledge possessed by the vanquished ; and the inhabitants of more than one half of Europe, who till that period had remained ignorant of the nature of civilized society, participated in the advantages. Time has, therefore, discovered to us a regular design in a series of events, which appeared at first but the effects of chance. Thus we perceive thought always predominant in the minutiae of actions and of ages.

The invasion of the barbarians was, without doubt, a calamity to the nations that were contemporaries of the revolution ; but the reality of the event was necessary to the propagation of knowledge. The enervated inhabitants of the east, in associating with the people of the north, were indebted to them for a degree of energy : whereas the people of the north acquired a mildness and docility that must have been of great service in completing their intellectual faculties. Whenever war is declared between two enlightened nations simply upon political interest, it may be considered as the most fatal scourge that ever resulted from the human passions : but the brilliant events recorded in the course of a war may occasionally enforce the adoption of certain ideas by the rapid authority of power.

It has been asserted by many writers that the

Christian religion was the cause of the degradation of letters and of philosophy : but I am fully convinced, that the Christian religion, at the period of its establishment, was indispensably necessary to civilization, and to the uniting of the spirit of the north with the manners of the east ; and I am farther of opinion, that the religious contemplations produced by Christianity to whatever object they might be applied developed the faculties of the mind, and prepared it for the reception of metaphysics, morality, and science.

There are certain periods in history, in which the love of glory and every other energetic passion appear to have been extinct. When calamity becomes general in a country, egotism is universal : a certain portion of happiness is absolutely necessary to the strength of a nation ; adversity cannot inspire with courage individuals whose spirits have been broken by it, except in the midst of a nation who have been so fortunate as to preserve the sensations of admiration or of pity ; but when all are equally overcome by affliction, public opinion loses its influence, and refuses its accustomed support to individuals : days and years may remain, but life has no aim, no end in view ; emulation has lost its vigor, and voluptuous pleasures become the sole interest of an inglorious existence, without honor and without morals. Such is described to be the state of the people of the east, under the chiefs of the lower empire.

Another nation, but who are equally as far from the true principles of virtue, made their appearance, and easily achieved a conquest over a people rendered pusillanimous by indolence and inactivity. The ferocity of despotism excited by war, in which ignorance was also predominant, had such an effect on the alarmed senses of men as to produce crimes, opposite indeed to the vile degradation of the people they had conquered, but more terrible in their effects. To civilize such conquerors, and to elevate such a race as had been conquered, was a task which nothing but enthusiasm could have effected :—that forcible power of the mind which, it is true, sometimes leads it astray, but which alone subdues that habitual instinct of self-love and increasing personality, that causes happiness to consist in an individual sacrifice.

I would have it understood, that I do not mean to weaken the indignation which is inspired by the crimes and follies of superstition ; but to consider each great epoch of the philosophical history of thought, relative to the state the human mind was in at that time ; and the Christian religion, when it was firmly established, was, as it appears to me, necessary to the progress of reason.

The people of the north esteemed life as of little value : this disposition, though it inspired them with a degree of personal courage, could not but be productive of cruelty towards others. They were possessed of genius, melancholy, and an inclination to the mysterious ; but at the same time they entertained a profound contempt for knowledge of every description, as incompatible with the spirit of a warrior. The women, possessing more leisure, were much better instructed than the men ; they were beloved, and the men were faithful to them : their affection naturally produced a degree of sensibility : but power and the loyal fidelity of a warrior, and truth as an attribute of power, were the only ideas they ever ascribed to virtue : the gratification of their vengeance was by them dignified with a place in the heavens. By exhibiting the scars in the foreparts of their bodies, by reciting the numbers of their enemies whose blood they had spilt, they thought to captivate the affections of the softer sex. They offered human victims to their mistresses, as to their gods. Their gloomy atmosphere presented nothing to their imagination but storms and darkness : they marked the revolution of days by the calculation of nights, and the progress of years by the

winters. The giants of frosts presided over their exploits. According to their traditions, the deluge of the earth was a deluge of blood ; and they believed that Odin looked down from heaven to animate their carnage. Their rewards and punishments were all proportioned to their actions in war. Man, with them, seemed born but for the destruction of his fellow-man. They paid no respect to advanced age : they regarded every species of study with contempt ; and were utter strangers to humanity. The faculties of their mind were engrossed by one pursuit :—war was their sole occupation, and their only aim was conquest.

Such were the principles from which were to be extracted gentleness, morality, and a taste for letters ; nor was the task to be executed upon the people of the east less difficult ; the Roman character, so celebrated for national pride and political institutions, was totally extinct : the inhabitants of Italy were disgusted with the very idea of glory ; they were entirely devoted to voluptuousness and sensuality ; they acknowledged plurality of gods, and ordained festivals to their honor ; and they acknowledged their sovereigns at the hands of a few soldiers, who elevated or disgraced them agreeably to their caprice or pleasure : constantly subject to an arbitrary proscription, they were regardless of death, not from the ideas inspired by courage, but from the intoxication of vice : death interrupted no brilliant projects, no progression of useful suggestions ; it severed no tender ties, it only interfered with the pleasures and amusements with which possibly they had been previously wearied and disgusted. Universal corruption had destroyed even the remembrance of virtue ; and had any one showed merely an inclination to have recalled it, he would only have excited astonishment united with censure. The moral virtues of the people of the east were swallowed up by sensual enjoyments ; while those of the people of the north were lost sight of amidst martial exercises. If there still existed among this degenerate people a vestige of that innate taste for the arts, letters, and philosophy, it was directed towards metaphysical subtleties ; while the sophistical spirit left them in doubt as to the truth of argument, and indifference respecting the affections of the heart.

It was in the midst of this deplorable depression into which the people of the east had fallen, that the Christian religion offered its powerful aid ; and taught them to embrace the rules of duty, a voluntary devotion, and gave them good assurances for the establishment of a holy faith. But it may be asked, would it not have been more desirable that they should have been recalled to virtue by philosophy ? In answer to which I observe, that it would have been impossible at that period to have acquired an influence over the human mind by any other means than the co-operation of the passions, which it may be said, are always in opposition to reason : religion alone is acquainted with the surest means to apply the passions most effectually to answer her own wise ends and purposes.

The nations of the earth were all influenced by enthusiasm : Mahomet, by fostering this propensity, gave birth to fanaticism, which advanced with the most astonishing facility. Mahomet was considered as a man certainly great in himself ; but his prodigious success was owing to the moral disposition of the times : his religion, however, was only calculated for the people of the east, as its chief tendency was to revive the military spirit, by offering pleasures as the recompense of their exploits :—it created warriors, but did not in the least assist the intellectual improvement. This general prophet employed himself entirely in the discipline of soldiers, and instilling obedience and enforcing it : but the dogma of fatality, which rendered them invincible in war, left them brutal and stupid during the time of peace. The Christian religion, having a

legislator, whose grand aim was the perfection of morals, and to unite under the same banner nations of different manners and of a contrary belief, could not fail of being more favorable to the increase of virtue and the expansion of the faculties of the mind. Many combinations were necessary, in order to secure the confidence of two nations so opposite in their manners as the people of the north and those of the east. The Christian religion was chosen by the people of the north; it was favorable to their melancholy disposition and inclination for gloomy images, and also to their continual and profound contemplation relative to the destination of the dead. There was nothing in the principles of paganism which could have rendered it acceptable to the people of this character; the dogmas of the Christian religion, and the exalted spirit of the first secretaries, encouraged and directed the habitual depression inspired by their cloudy atmosphere. Some of their virtues, as truth, chastity, and a strict observance of their promises, were consecrated by the divine laws; thus religion, without altering the nature of their courage, contrived to divert it to another object; their customs required them to support every hardship with magnanimity, in order to be esteemed illustrious in war: religion enjoined them to brave all sufferings, and even death itself, in the defence of their faith and the fulfilment of their several duties: destructive intrepidity was changed into an unshaken resolution; and resistance, which had no other aim but to conquer force, was directed by principles of morality. The errors of fanaticism have often perverted the judgment and ruined the principles; but in this instance it caused a nation, till then invincible, to understand and acknowledge a power superior to their own; to substitute duties for laws, and the terror produced by religion proved a restraint on their actions. The man of inferior abilities menaced his superior, and the dawn of equality may be said to have first received its existence.

The people of the east, susceptible of enthusiasm, readily devoted themselves to a life of contemplation, which was analogous to their climate and inclinations. They were the first to receive with ardor the monarchical institutions. Austerities and mortifications were quickly adopted by a nation given up to a voluptuous satiety which naturally led to an exaggeration of religious observances. A people so ardent, credulous, and fanatic, were an easy prey to superstition, and to crimes at which nature and humanity shudder; religion was less beneficial to them than to the people of the north, on account of their more extended depravity and corruption of morals. The task is easier to civilize an ignorant race, than to elevate a corrupted people from their state of depravation.

The Christian religion gave new vigor to the principles of moral life in a set of men who were without connection, without any direct pursuit in view, or any tie that could endear their existence. It is true, it was incapable of restoring to them their country; but it elevated their thoughts, polluted with the vices of mankind, to a future state; and they found consolation in the hope of participating in a happy immortality. Thus many characters were awakened to energy by religion; and in consequence of the follies of martyrdom, resulted a renunciation of self-interest, and an abstraction of thought, which proved very favorable to the human intellect.

The Christian religion became a bond of union between the people of the north and those of the east; it blended manners and opinions that were before diametrically opposite; and, by reconciling the most inveterate enemies, formed nations, among whom energy has strengthened talents, and talents have awakened energy. This reciprocal benefit was, nevertheless, produced by slow degrees: eternal providence employs centuries in the accomplishment of its designs; while our finite existence feels irritated and amazed at the

delay. But eventually the victors and the vanquished have formed but one united people in the different countries of Europe:—to this end the Christian religion has most powerfully contributed.

But before I proceed in analyzing some other advantages of the Christian religion, I must request permission to stop here, to make a few remarks upon what strikes me to be a resemblance between this epoch and the French revolution.

The nobility, or those who ranked in the first class of society, generally united all the advantages of a distinguished education; but they were enervated by prosperity, and by degrees lost those virtues which might have rendered their social pre-eminence excusable; while it may be observed, that the lower orders of the people had not advanced far in civilization; and their manners, which were restrained by laws, were likely to revert to their natural ferocity on the first dawn of liberty:—it may almost be said, that they made an invasion upon the superior classes of society; and that all we have suffered, and all we condemn in the revolution, arises from that fatal necessity of confiding the direction of affairs to those conquerors of the civil order, whose aim was certainly directed by philosophy, but whose education was many centuries behind those whom they conquered. Those who have been conquerors in the field, and victorious at home, bear a great resemblance in character to the men of the north; and in the vanquished we acknowledge the analogy to the acquirements, the prejudices, the vices, and the social description of the people of the east. But due latitude must be given for the education of conquerors, and the knowledge which was formerly confined to a few individuals, must be expanded before the leading rulers in France will be entirely divested of barbarity and vulgarity.

We are however led to hope, that the civilization of our northern nations will not require ten or twelve centuries; we make more rapid advances than our ancestors did, and the reason is obvious. Amongst a people deriving no advantage from education, men are frequently discovered who possesses a remarkably clear understanding and quick perception, added to the benefits resulting from the present enlightened century, the use of the press, and a knowledge of the surrounding nations; which must each of them necessarily contribute to aid the progress of a class of people newly admitted to the direction of political affairs. But it is difficult at present to anticipate what will be the final result of the war between the ancient possessors and the new conquerors. It will be a happy termination, if we shall discover, as at the epoch of the invasion of the northern nations, a philosophical system, a virtuous enthusiasm, and a solid and equitable legislation, that might prove to us the light the Christian religion appeared in to the ancients; sentiments in which the conqueror and the conquered may be said to have united. This reconciliation between the north and the east, which was so beneficial to the world, was not the only advantage which resulted from the Christian religion; for it is generally believed, that the abolition of slavery was the consequence of its benign precepts: to this decree of justice we may add other benefits which it conferred upon mankind, namely domestic happiness and the sympathy of pity.

Every circumstance with the ancients, even their domestic concerns, bore the marks of that odious institution of slavery; the disposal of life and death was vested in parental authority: the repeated instances of that barbarous custom of publicly exposing their children;—the power of husbands, similar in many respects to that of fathers;—in short, all their civil laws bore some analogy to that detestable code which delivered man into the power of man; and created two classes, the one of which conceived themselves obliged by no relative duties towards the other: and this idea once adopt-

ed, it was only by slow gradations that they could arrive at liberty. The women during the term of their lives, and the children in a state of infancy, were subjected in a certain degree to the conditions of slavery.

In the degenerate ages of the Roman empire, the women were torn from their servitude by the most unbridled licentiousness, and plunged into the abyss of degradation; but the introduction of Christianity restored them, in respect to moral and religious duties at least, to a state of equality with the men. Christianity, by rendering marriage a sacred institution, secured the affection which arose from conjugal attachment; the dogmas of purgatory exacted the same punishments from both sexes, and promised the same recompense to each. The Evangelists, who recommended private virtues, an obscure destiny, and a pious humility, offered to both sexes the means of obtaining a religious palm. The mind is disposed towards religion by sensibility; on which account women surpassed men in that Christian emulation which Europe possessed during the first centuries of modern history.

The roving people of the north were, by the influence of religion, brought to a settled state of life and the enjoyments of domestic happiness they settled themselves in one country, and dwelt in society; and the legislation of civil life was reformed by an adherence to religious principles. It was at this period that women were admitted to their proper station in life; and from this time the sweets of domestic happiness begun to be experienced. A too great share of power is injurious to native goodness, and destroys all delicacy; with one part of the creation, neither virtues nor sentiments could resist the exercise of authority; and with the other, they would vanish by the means of habitual apprehension. The felicity of man arises from the independence of the object of his desires: he may conceive that he is beloved, when chosen by a free being who makes it their study to conform to his wishes, to obey him; and to relinquish her taste, her habits, and her time, to render his existence complete. How much the perfections of his mind, and the sentiments of his heart are increased by the ideas and the impressions of a union of this description, is obvious: the parties having languished a length of time in a solitary and joyless state, now enter, as it were into a new world of their own creating, by contributing to the moral existence of each other.

Few works of real superiority have been written by women: nevertheless, they have been eminently useful in the progress of literature, from the number of ideas with which men have been inspired by their constant intercourse with female delicacy and sensibility. Productions of every kind have been multiplied, since objects have been considered in a new point of view: the confidence inspired by a near and dear connection, has conveyed more instruction to the moral nature than all the treatises and systems which have been written by men,—such as they appear to each other, and not what they are in reality.

Commiseration for sufferings must, in every age, have naturally existed in the human heart; nevertheless, how different are the morals of antiquity from those of Christianity! The one is founded upon violence, and the other upon sympathy. The warlike spirit must have presided at the origin of societies, is discernible even in the philosophy of the Stoics: self-command was exercised, so to speak, with a warlike energy: the happiness of others was not the object of ancient morality, the principal aim of the philosophers being to render men independent of each other.

The Christian religion also requires self denial: this virtue has, by monkish fanaticism, been extended far beyond the austerity of ancient philosophy: but the principles of this sacrifice, so strongly enjoined by *Christianity, are, perfect submission to the divine will, and meek humility towards our fellow-creatures;—*

not like the Stoics, to sacrifice every thing to the pride and dignity of our own character. By an attention to the literal sense of the gospel, unsullied by the false interpretations which have been given of it, we clearly perceive that a benevolent spirit of compassion towards the unhappy pervades its every page: and we there find it is considered as a duty incumbent upon man to feel deeply for the distresses incident to humanity.

In order to acquire a knowledge of the human heart, it was expedient to adopt a system of morality altogether sympathetic: and although religion in general enjoins a subjection of the passions, that of Christianity came much nearer than that of the stoics to the knowledge of their power. Its peculiar benignity and indulgence gave a greater latitude to the character of men to develop themselves; and philosophy, whose purpose is to study the movements of the human heart, certainly acquired much knowledge by it.

Literature was also considerably benefited by the effects produced by melancholy. It is true, that the religion of the people of the north inspired them at all times with a similar disposition; but it is to Christianity that the French orators were indebted for those powerful and gloomy ideas which added grandeur to their eloquence.

The Christian religion has been accused of producing a degree of relaxation in the human mind: but the intention of the gospel was to counteract a ferocious and cruel disposition: how then is it possible to inspire at the same time a great portion of humanity toward our fellow-creatures and a perfect indifference for ourselves? Murder must be represented in sanguinary colors; a sensation of horror must be excited for bloodshed and death; and nature itself will not suffer sympathy to remain entirely exterior.

It is admitted, that fanaticism has at different times obscured the sentiments of humanity which are annexed to the Christian religion: but it is its general spirit that I wish to examine; and in our own times, and in the countries where the reformation has been established, we may remark what salutary effects the gospel has had on the morals.

The toleration of paganism was regretted by the philosophers, when they compared it with the fanaticism inspired by the Christian religion. Strong passions frequently precipitate men into the commission of crimes which cooler reason would never have permitted: but there are events in history where the exertion of such passions invigorate society; reason, assisted by time, profits by the effects of great commotions; and many ideas have been discovered by the help of the passions, which would have remained in darkness without them.

The human mind requires a violent concussion, in order to annex its ideas to novel objects: even earthquakes and subterraneous fires have presented to mankind sources of wealth which time alone would not have been sufficient to have discovered. I think I discern another proof in favor of this opinion, in the great influence acquired by the study of theology beyond that of metaphysics; this pursuit has often been condemned as a very idle and useless method of employing talents; and it has also been alleged as one of the principal causes of the barbarity of the first centuries of our era. Nevertheless, it is a style of intellectual effort which has developed, in a singular manner, the faculties of the mind. If we judge the result of this labor only as connected with the arts suggested by imagination, nothing certainly can give a more unfavorable opinion of it. The noble elegance and graceful forms of antiquity are entirely obscured beneath the pedantic errors of theological writers; but that degree of understanding which is adapted to the study of the sciences, is acquired by disputing upon different opinions, notwithstanding their object is equally puerile and absurd. Attention and abstraction are naturally inherent in a mind of deep re-



fection; and those faculties are alone sufficient to aid the progress of the human understanding.

The talents and the imagination which are by this means derived, give new vigor to the memory: but it is entirely owing to metaphysical method that we are indebted for fresh ideas. The abilities of men are exercised by spiritual dogmas in the conception of abstract sentiments; and the extended contention of the mind, actuated by the subtle chain of theological consequences, prepares the faculties for the study of the more abstruse sciences. But it may be asked, how can a deep examination into the nature of error be serviceable towards bringing to light the knowledge of truth? It is that art of reasoning, and that strict meditation, by which we are enabled to pursue metaphysical references, and to create order and method, which is always an useful exercise for the faculties of thought, from whatever degree they are taken, and whatever end they wish to arrive at.

Without doubt, if the faculties which were thus developed had not since been directed to other objects, much mischief would have been produced to the human species; but in the discovery of the revival of letters we perceive ideas so quickly arise, and the sciences to advance in so rapid and extraordinary a manner, that we are led to believe, that even in pursuing a false bias, the mind acquired the strength and knowledge which accelerated its progress towards reason and philosophy.

Some men are disposed from inclination to study the abstract; but the greater number are tempted by party-interest. Political knowledge made rapid advances during the first years of the French revolution; because it served the ambition of some, and created general agitation. Theological questions, in their time, were objects creative of a lively interest and a profound analysis: the disputes to which they gave rise, were animated by the authority of power and the fear of persecution. If the spirit of faction had not introduced itself into metaphysics, and if ambition had not been interested in abstract discussions, men would not have felt a sufficient motive to have induced them to overcome those difficulties which are necessary to the discoveries and progress of the subsequent ages.

Thus instruction makes its way among all ranks of people. When the professed opinions upon any order of ideas whatever, become the cause and the weapons of parties; hatred, and rage, and jealousy, united to each report, engage on every side the objects in discussion, and agitate with violence every question depending: but when the passions have subsided, reason carefully looks round the field of contest for some fragments to assist in the researches after truth.

Every institution, merely beneficial in the moment of danger, may be considered in itself an insupportable abuse, after having corrected abuses still more atrocious. Chivalry was necessary to soften military ferocity; and tended to the cultivation of female society, and of religion: but chivalry, as an order, as a sect, as the cause of separating mankind instead of uniting them, ought to have been considered as a fatal evil the moment that it ceased to be of any essential utility.

The Roman jurisprudence, which they were happy to have received by a people whose extent of knowledge consisted in the right of conquest, became a cunning and pedantic study; it occupied the greater part of the learned men, who had relinquished for it the pursuit of theology. The knowledge of the ancient languages, which revived the true literary taste, inspired for some time an absurd mania for erudition; the present and the future were almost annihilated in the puerile examination of the most trifling circumstances which retrospect afforded; commentaries upon the works of the ancients preceded philosophical observations:—it appeared as if it were ordained that literary productions should interfere with mankind and nature. The great estimation in which erudition was holden, entirely en-

grossed the spirit of invention; and every event that concerned the ancients, acquired an equal degree of interest.

Nevertheless, these different foibles had their separate advantages; and we may perceive, on the revival of letters, that those nations which were esteemed barbarous were beneficial as well as others; first, they added to the number of civilized people; and secondly, they were of use in bringing the understanding to perfection.

If we consider the revival of letters only in its relation to the works of imagination and taste, we shall find, without doubt, that there have been nearly sixteen hundred years lost; and that, since the time of Virgil to the period of the Catholic mysteries represented on the Paris theatres, the human understanding, in the acquirement of arts, has been retrograding towards the most absurd barbarism. But this was not the case with philosophical works. Bacon, Machiavel, Montaigne, and Galileo, all nearly contemporaries, in three different countries, emerged all at once out of general obscurity; and shew themselves, for many centuries forward, the last writers of ancient literature, and, above all, the last philosophers of antiquity.

If the human understanding had not made some progress even in those centuries in which we can scarcely discover any traces of it; should we have seen, at the period of the revival of letters, men who, in morals, politics, and the sciences, surpassed the greatest geniuses of antiquity? If there exists an infinite distance between the late celebrated men of antiquity and those who are illustrious in letters and sciences; and if Bacon, Machiavel, and Montaigne, possessed ideas and knowledge superior to those of Pliny, Marcus Aurelius, &c.; is it not evident, that the human reason did not lie dormant during the centuries which separated the lives of those celebrated men? We must not lose sight of the principle which I enforced at the commencement of this work, namely, that the most distinguished genius never rises but a very few degrees above the knowledge of his own century. The history of the human understanding during the interval which elapsed between the time of Pliny and Bacon, Epictetus and Montaigne, Plutarch and Machiavel, is very little understood by us; because men and nations, generally speaking, were confounded together in the single event of war; but military exploits created a very feeble interest after the period of their power was past. There has never, since the commencement of the world, been any other standard for enlightened men to abide by, but the advancement of knowledge and of reason; nevertheless, let us observe, with the learned man, the secret manner in which nature combines her developments. The moralist perceives the combination of causes which, during the space of fourteen hundred years, have been bringing about the actual state of the sciences and of philosophy.

What strength of mind suddenly shone forth in the middle of the fifteenth century! What important discoveries were made! New methods were adopted in a few years! Such a rapid progress, such an astonishing success! must they not have some connection with something anterior? And even in the arts, was not all false taste quickly expelled! The progress of thought in a very short time discovered the principles of the really beautiful; and literature was rapidly brought to perfection, from the great exercise the mind had experienced on its return to the path of reason, during which it made speedy advances toward perfection.

One principal cause of the eager emulation which was excited by the revival of letters, was the great splendor it annexed to the name of a good writer. We are in some degree astonished at the homage obtained by Petrarch, and are equally surprised at the importance, that was attached to the publication of his works.



nets. Wearied with the absurd military prejudice, the aim of which was to degrade and abolish literature, the people descended into the opposite extreme : it is also possible that the parade of recompensing opinions was necessary to excite men to the difficult labor required, three centuries since, to render modern languages perfect, to effect the regeneration of philosophical spirit, and the creation of a new method for metaphysics and the more difficult sciences.

But let us stop at that period which commences the new era ; whence we may reckon, without interruption, the most astonishing conquests of the genius of mankind ; and in comparing our literary treasures with those of antiquity, so far from suffering ourselves to be discouraged by a sterile admiration of the past, let us encourage ourselves with the fertile enthusiasm of hope ; let us unite our efforts ; let us spread our sails, and catch every breeze that can waft us to futurity.

## CHAPTER IX.

### OF THE GENERAL SPIRIT OF MODERN LITERATURE.

It may be thought, and not to imagination, that we are indebted for the new acquisitions made to literature in the middle ages. Imitation, the principle of the fine arts, as I have before remarked, does not admit of unlimited perfection : the moderns, in this respect, can never proceed farther than by following the path traced out by the ancients. But if the images of poetry and description always remain nearly the same ; more eloquence is added to the passions by a new development of sensibility and a profound knowledge of character, which gives a charm to our superior specimens of literature, which cannot be attributed solely to poetical imagination.

The ancients esteemed men as their friends, while they considered women in no other light than as slaves designed by nature for that unhappy state ; and indeed the greater part of them were deserving of that appellation ; their minds were not furnished with a single idea that could distinguish them from the brute creation, nor were they enlightened by one generous sentiment : this circumstance, without doubt, was the cause why the ancients represented in their tender scenes merely sensations.

The preference of the ancients towards the softer sex was solely influenced by their beauty : but the moderns acknowledge, that superior talents and ties can alone insure their happiness or misery, in that predilection to which they owe the destiny of their lives.

Novels, those varied productions of modern genius, were almost entirely unknown to the ancients : it is true, they composed a few pastorals in that style, at a period when the Greeks endeavored to discover some employment as a relaxation during servitude. But before women had created an interest in domestic life, there was nothing sufficiently desirable to excite the curiosity of men, whose time was almost entirely occupied by political pursuits.

A greater number of shades were perceptible in the characters of women, which their wish to obtain power, and their fear of subjection, presented to general view ; but they were singularly useful in furnishing new secrets of emotion for the exercise of dramatic talents ; their fear of death, their desire of life, the devotion of themselves, their resentments, and in short, every sentiment which they were suffered to deliver, embellished literature with new expressions. The women, it may be said, not being strictly answerable for their conduct, did not scruple to relate what their different sentiments naturally suggested. A solid understanding, with a *scrutinizing discernment*, may clearly perceive these *developments of the human heart* when it appears in a

state of nature : it is for this reason that the modern moralists have, in general, so much the advantage over the ancients in regard to their subtility in the knowledge of mankind.

With the ancients, those who could not acquire fame, had no motive for development : but after the period when connections were formed in domestic life, the communications of the mind and the exercise of morals always existed, at least in a limited circle ; the children became dearer to the parents from reciprocal tenderness, which more closely united the conjugal tie ; and the different affections assumed the appearance of that divine alliance of friendship in love, of attraction and esteem, of a merited confidence and an involuntary seduction.

Advanced age that was crowned with glory and virtue, although it ceased to hope, might continue to be animated by the emotions of the heart, and was consoled with a pensive melancholy which allowed individuals to remember, to regret, and still to regard what had formerly claimed their affection. When moral reflections have been united to the violent passions of youth, they may be extended by an exalted remembrance to the termination of existence, and present the same pleasing picture through the awful variations of time.

A profound and melancholy sensibility is one of the greatest beauties perceptible in some of our modern writings : this, without doubt, is owing to the fair sex, who, being ignorant of most other things in life, except the art of pleasing, transmitted the softness of their impressions to the style of certain authors. In perusing those works which were composed since the renewal of letters, we may in every separate page remark those ideas which were wanting before they accorded to women a kind of civil equality.

Generosity, courage, and humanity, have in some respects a different meaning. The ancients founded the chief of their virtues on the love of their country : the qualities of women were exercised in a different and an independent manner :—a sympathy for misfortune, a pity for weakness, an elevation of soul, without any other aim than the enjoyment of that elevation, is much more in their nature than political virtues. The moderns, influenced by women, easily gave way to philanthropy, and the mind acquired a more philosophical liberty when they were less under the empire of exclusive associations.

The only advantage which the writers of the last centuries have over the ancients in their works of imagination, is the talent of expressing a more delicate sensibility ; and that of giving greater variety to situations and characters, from a more intimate knowledge of the human heart. But how much superior are the philosophers of the present era in the sciences, in method, in analysis, in the arrangement of ideas, and the chain of events.

Mathematical arguments resemble the two great ideas of metaphysics, space and eternity ; millions of leagues may be added, and centuries multiplied ; each calculation is true, yet the term remains indefinite. The wisest step ever taken by the human understanding was, to renounce all doubtful systems, and adopt methods capable of demonstration.

Although modern eloquence may be deficient in the emulation of a free people ; nevertheless it acquires from philosophy and a melancholy imagination a new character, which has a very powerful effect. I do not think, that among the ancients, there was one composition, or a single orator, that could equal Bossuet, Rousseau, or the English, in some of their poetry, or the German in some of their phrases, in the sublime art of affecting the heart. It is to the spirituality of the Christian ideas, and to the sombre truths of philosophy, that we must attribute the art of introducing, even into private discussions, general and affecting reflections which

touched the heart, awakened recollection, and induced man to consider the interest of his fellow-creatures.

The ancients knew how to add vigor to the arguments necessary to be used on every occasion; but, at the present period, the mind, through a succession of ages, has become so indifferent to the interest of individuals and also to that of nations, that the eloquent writer finds it necessary to adopt a more pathetic style, in order to awaken the feelings which are common to all men. Without doubt, it is requisite to strike the imagination with a lively and forcible impression of the object intended to create an interest; but the appeal to pity is never irresistible, except when melancholy represents what the imagination has portrayed.

The moderns possess a readiness of expression, the sole aim of which is to engage the eloquence of thought: antiquity presents no model of this kind but Tacitus. Montesquieu, Pascal, and Machiavel, are eloquent by a single expression, by a striking epithet, or in a rapidity of imagery, the purpose of which is the elucidation of an idea, and the endeavor to enlarge and embellish what is intended to be explained. The impression given by this peculiar style, may be compared to the effect produced by the disclosure of an important secret: it seems likewise as if a number of thoughts had preceded that which had just been expressed, and each separate idea appears connected with the most profound meditations; and that suddenly, and by a single word, we are permitted to extend our ideas to those immense regions which have been accurately traced by the efforts of genius.

The ancient philosophers exercised, so to speak, a magistracy of instruction among men: having always in view the general benefit, they enforced certain rules, and left nothing undone that was likely to enlighten mankind. The knowledge of morals must have advanced with the progress of human reason; but philosophical demonstrations are considered more applicable to that moral which is of the intellectual order. We must not compare modern virtues with those of the ancients, as citizens: it is only in a free country where there can exist that constant duty and that generous relation between the citizens and their country. It is true that, in a despotic government, custom or prejudice may still inspire some brilliant acts of military courage; but the continued and painful attention given to civil employments and legislative virtues, added to the disinterested sacrifice of the greater part of their lives to the public, can only exist where there is a real passion for liberty: it is therefore in private qualities, sentiments of philanthropy, and in a few writings of a superior order, that we are to examine the progress of morals.

The principles of modern philosophy are much more conducive to happiness than those of the ancients: the duties imposed by our moralists are courtesy, docility, pity and affection. Filial reverence was holden in the highest estimation by the ancients, and parental attachment is viewed in the same light by the moderns; but without doubt, in the connection between father and son, it is more advantageous that the benefactor should be the individual whose tenderness is the strongest.

The ancients could not be exceeded in their love of justice, but they did not consider benevolence as a duty; justice may be enforced by the laws, notwithstanding general opinion is the criterion of beneficence, and is sufficient to exclude from esteem the being who is insensible to the miseries of his fellow-creatures.

The ancients only required of others to refrain from injuring them; and simply desired them not to *stand in their sunshine*, but that they might be left to nature and themselves. But the moderns, endowed with softer sentiments, solicit assistance, support, and that interest which their situation inspires. They have constituted

into a virtue every thing that can be useful to mutual happiness; domestic ties are cemented by a rational liberty; and no one has an arbitrary power over his fellow-creature.

With the ancient people of the north, lessons of prudence, dexterity, and maxims which commanded a supernatural empire over their own afflictions, were placed among the first precepts of virtue: but the importance of duties is much better classed by the moderns; the reciprocal obligation from man to man holds the first rank; what regards ourselves, ought to be considered relatively to the influence which we may possess over the destiny of others. What each individual is to procure, to promote his own happiness, is a counsel and not an order: the strictest moral does not impute to man as a crime that grief which is natural, and which his feelings will not allow him to conceal, but that grief which he occasions to others.

In a word, that which both the gospel and philosophy alike inculcate, is the doctrine of humanity. We are taught to respect the gift of life; and the existence of man is now considered as sacred to man, and is not viewed with that political indifference which some of the ancients believed compatible with the true principles of virtue. We now feel a sensation of horror at the sight of blood; and the warrior who is entirely indifferent to his own personal danger, acquires a degree of honor when he shudders at being the necessary cause of destruction to another. If any circumstance at this period gives reason to apprehend, that a condemnation has been unjust, that an innocent person has fallen a victim to a supposed justice, nations will listen with terror to the lamentations which arise from an irreparable misfortune; the sensation caused by an unmerited death is recorded from one generation to another; and even children will listen with horror to the recital of so great a grievance. When the eloquent Lally, twenty years after the death of his father, demanded in France the re-establishment of his manes; those young men who could not have seen or known the victim whom he wished to reclaim, felt themselves violently agitated, and shed tears in abundance, as if that fatal day, when innocence was sacrificed, could never be effaced from their remembrance.

Thus ages rolled on towards the conquest of liberty for virtue is always its herald. Alas! by what means shall we banish the painful contrast which so forcibly strikes the imagination? One crime was recollected during a long succession of years; but we have since witnessed cruelties without number committed and forgotten at the same moment! And it was under the shadow of the republic, the noblest, the most glorious, and the proudest institution of the human mind, that those execrable crimes have been committed! Ah! how difficult do we find it to repel those melancholy ideas, every time we reflect upon the destiny of man: the horrid phantom of the revolution appears before us: in vain we wish to look back on times that are past; in vain we desire to recognise in late events the constant connection of abstract combinations: if in the regions of metaphysics one word awakens recollection, the emotions of the heart resume all their empire, and no longer supported by reflection, we are suddenly plunged into the abyss of despair.

Nevertheless, let us not yield to this despondency, but return to general observations and literary ideas; to any thing and every thing, in short, that can divert our attention from personal sentiments; they are of too painful a nature to be developed: talents may be animated by a certain degree of emotion: but long and heavy affliction stifles the genius of expression; and when sorrow is become habitual to the mind, the imagination loses even the wish to express what it feels.

## CHAPTER X.

## OF THE SPANISH AND ITALIAN LITERATURE.

The greatest part of the ancient manuscripts, the monuments of art, and in short, all the remains of Roman splendor and knowledge, existed in Italy : and considerable expenses and the authority of public power were necessary in order to make the researches requisite to bring them to light. It was consequently in this country, where the sources of all scientific pursuits were to be found, that literature first made its re-appearance, and commenced its career under the auspices of princes : for the different means which are indispensably necessary to the first progress, are immediately dependent upon the power and will of government.

The protection of the Italian princes greatly contributed to the revival of letters : but it must have been an obstacle to the light of philosophy : and those obstacles would have existed even if religious superstition had not, in many instances, been detrimental to the investigation of truth.

I must once more explain the meaning which I have constantly attached to the word *philosophy* in the course of this work ; what I mean by the use of that term, is a more minute inquiry into the principles of political and religious institutions ; the analysis of characters, and the events of history : in a word, the study of the human heart, and the natural rights of man. Such a philosophy imagines a state of liberty, or must necessarily lead towards it.

The men of letters in Italy were farther from that independence requisite to this philosophy, than any other nation ; as they required pecuniary means and the approbation of princes, in order to discover those manuscripts of antiquity that were to serve them as guides.

There were in all the great cities of Italy numberless academies and universities : these associations were particularly proper for the learned researches that were to rescue from oblivion so many superior compositions of antiquity. But these public establishments, even from the nature of their institutions, were entirely under the subjection of government ; and the corporations, like all other orders, classes, and sects, were extremely useful to one particular aim, but much less favorable than the efforts of individual genius to the advancement of philosophy. We must add to these general reflections, that the long and patient researches requisite for the examination of the ancient manuscripts, was peculiarly adapted to a monastic life : and the monks, in fact, were the most active in the study of literature. Thus the same cause which produced the revival of letters, opposed the development of natural reason. The Italians took the first steps, and pointed out the way in which the human understanding has since made such immense progress ; but they were destined never to make any advance in the path which they themselves had laid open.

In Italy, the imagination was intoxicated by the imitable charms of poetry and the fine arts : but the writers in prose were, in general, neither moralists nor philosophers, and their efforts to appear eloquent produced nothing but bombast. Nevertheless, as it is in the nature of the human understanding always to improve ; the Italians, to whom philosophy was interdicted, and who could not, in poetry, exceed the limit prescribed to all arts,—that of perfection the Italians, I say, rendered themselves illustrious by the astonishing progress which, by their perseverance, they affected in the sciences. After the century of Leo X, after Ariosto and Tasso, their poetry visibly assumed a retrograde course : but, in Galileo, Cassini, and in others

still more recently, they acquired a number of useful discoveries in nature which associated them for the intellectual perfection of the human species.

Superstition made many attempts to persecute Galileo ; but a number of the Italian princes came to his relief. Religious fanaticism is very inimical to the arts and sciences, as well as to philosophy ; but absolute regal power, or federal aristocracy, have often protected them, and are only averse to a philosophical independence.

In a country where priesthood is predominant, every evil and every prejudice have been often found united : but the diversity of governments in Italy lightened the yoke of priesthood, by creating a rivalry between those states or princes, who secured the very limited independence necessary to the arts and sciences.

After having affirmed, that it was in the sciences only that the Italians advanced progressively, and furnished their tribute towards the general knowledge of the human species ; let us proceed to examine into each branch of intellectual learning, into philosophy, eloquence, and poetry, with the causes of the successes and failures of the Italian literature.

The subdivision of states in the same country is, in general, very favorable to philosophy : this is what I have occasion to show in speaking of the German literature. But in Italy, this subdivision did not produce its natural effect ; the despotism of the priests destroyed, in a great measure, the happy results which might have arisen from a federal government ; it would perhaps have been better, if the whole nation had been united under one government ; their recollection would have been more active, and the sentiments it inspired would have produced a retrospect favorable to virtue.

Principalities, whether under a federal or a theocratical government, have each of them been a prey to civil wars, parties, and factions ; altogether unfavorable to liberty. The minds of men were depraved by mutual hatred, instead of being enlarged by the love of their country. Even while they submitted to tyranny, they were familiar with assassination : incredulity was occasionally found the companion of fanaticism, but sound reason was never to be met with.

The Italians, notwithstanding their general incredulity and their universal professions, were much more addicted to pleasantry than reasoning : which led them to make a jest of their own existence. When they wished to lay aside their natural talent, the comic, and attempted eloquent orations, they were always mixed with the most absurd affectation. Their recollection of past grandeur, without one idea of present greatness, must necessarily produce the *stupendous*. The Italians might possess dignity, if there were any mixture of the gloomy or melancholy in their characters ; but when the successors of the Romans, deprived of all national splendor, and all political liberty, are yet the gayest people on earth, it shows that there is a natural want of elevation of soul.

It was perhaps from antipathy to the Italian bombast, that Machiavel used such extreme simplicity when he analyzed tyranny. It is very probable that he wished, that the horror of crimes should arise from the development of their principles ; and carrying his contempt rather too far even for the appearance of declamation, he left every thing to the imagination of his readers. The reflections of Machiavel upon Titus Livy are far superior to his *Prince*. These reflections may be considered as one of the works in which the human understanding has showed itself to the greatest advantage : such a production belongs entirely to the genius of the author, and has no connection with the general character of the Italian literature.

The troubles of Florence, without doubt, contributed to give to the ideas of Machiavel a greater energy :

but it appears to me, that in studying his work, we can feel they are the productions of a man who fancied himself as standing alone in creation : he writes as if for himself solely, without concerning himself about the effects which his writings might produce on others.

Machiavel may be accused of not having foreseen the bad consequences that might have arisen from his books : but it is not to be credited, that a man of such extensive genius would have adopted the theory of vice ; which theory is too brief, and has too little of the prospective even in its most profound combinations.

Among the number of Italian historians there are none, not even Guichardin and F. Paolo, whom they esteem the most, who will in any degree bear a comparison with those of antiquity, or with the English historians amongst the moderns ; they certainly have erudition ; but they neither examine men nor ideas. But perhaps it was really dangerous under the Italian government to judge philosophically of institutions and characters : possibly this people, once so great, and now so degraded, were, like Rinaldo in the palace of Armida, importuned by every thought that could interrupt their pleasures and their repose.

It would have been natural to suppose, that the eloquence of the pulpit would have been superior in Italy to that of any other nation ; because they were under the dominion of a positive religion. Nevertheless, this country offers nothing celebrated in that style of eloquence ; while France can boast of the greatest talents of that description. The Italians, if we except a certain number of enlightened men, were alike in religion, in love, and in liberty ; fond of the bombast in every thing ; and felt no real sentiment in any thing. They were vindictive, yet servile ; they were slaves to the female sex, yet total strangers to the deep and lasting sentiments of the heart : they were the victims of superstition, strictly adhering to all Catholic ceremonies ; but they did not believe in an indissoluble alliance between religion and morals. Such is the effect that might naturally have been expected from fanatical prejudices ; from divors governments which never united in the love and defence of their country ; and from the heat of their climate, which excited every sensation, and rendered them prone to indulge every degree of voluptuousness, if its effects are not opposed, as with the Romans, by the energetic pursuit of politics. In short all countries where public authority sets the limits of superstition against researches into philosophical truths ; when emulation has exhausted itself on the fine arts ; enlightened men, having neither path to follow, nor aim or expectation in view, are naturally discouraged, and a total listlessness takes possession of their faculties, and scarcely leaves to the mind strength sufficient to find amusement for itself.

After having expressed, perhaps with some degree of severity, what was wanting in the Italian literature, we must return to the fascinating charms of their brilliant imagination.

That period of literature is worthy of being remarked, in which was discovered the secret of exciting the curiosity by the invention and recital of private adventures. The *romantic* was introduced into the north and east by two distinct causes. In the north, the spirit of chivalry often gave rise to extraordinary events ; and in order to make their recitals interesting to the warriors, they were obliged to relate exploits similar to their own : to render literature subservient to the recital or the invention of the splendid achievements of chivalry was the only means to overcome the repugnance in which learning was holden by men who were even then but in a state of barbarity.

It may also be farther remarked, that Oriental despotism turned the mind to words of imagination ; moral truths could not be risked but under the form of a *fable*, and talents were exercised to invent and detail *fictions* : it was natural for slaves to take refuge in a

world of fancy ; and as their imagination was further animated by the heat of their climate, there was a greater variety in the Arabian tales than in the romances of chivalry. But in Italy they were both united ; the invasion of the people of the north transported into the east the tradition of the exploits of chivalry ; and their connection with Spain enriched their poetry with a number of events taken from the Arabian tales. It is to this happy mixture that we are indebted for Ariosto and Tasso.

The art of exciting pity and terror by developing the passions of the heart, is a talent in which philosophy claims a great part : but the effects of the *marvelous* upon credulity is more powerful : as the explanation cannot be foreseen by any combination, and curiosity cannot be satisfied by the anticipation of any thing probable : all is therefore surprise and astonishment.

In the romances of chivalry, we may perceive a singular mixture of the Christian religion in which the writers believed, and the magic which they feared : and in the Oriental writings, a continual combat was visible between the new religion, and the ancient idolatry over which Mahomet triumphed. The Roman and Grecian mythology was a composition much more simple, and was more nearly connected with moral ideas ; being generally the emblem or the allegory. But the *wonderful* of the Arabians was more attractive to curiosity. The one appears like a dream of terror ; and the other a happy comparison of the moral and physical orders.

The literature of the Spaniards ought to have been more remarkable than that of the Italians ; it should have united the imagination of the north with that of the east, the Oriental grandeur with the splendor of chivalry, the martial spirit which repeated wars had exalted and the poetry which was inspired by the beauty of their climate : but regal power, which served as a prop for superstition, stifled in their birth those puerile dispositions to glory.

The subdivision of states, although it precluded Italy from becoming one nation, gave sufficient liberty for the study of the sciences : but the united despotism of Spain, in encouraging the active power of the Inquisition, left no pursuit for thought, no resource nor means of escaping the yoke. We may, however, judge what the Spanish literature might have been, by some essays which may yet be collected.

The romances of the Moors established in Spain, borrowed their respect for the fair-sex from chivalry, This respect was not to be found in the national manners of the east. The Arabs who remained in Africa, did not in this instance resemble the Arabs established in Spain : the Moors inspired the Spaniards with their spirit of magnificence ; and the Spaniards reciprocally taught their love and their chivalric honor to the Moors. No mixture could be more favorable to works of imagination, if literature had been encouraged in Spain. Amongst their romances, the *'Cid'* gives us some idea of the grandeur which would have characterized the efforts of their genius. In the poem of Camoens, which is written in the same spirit as many of the Spanish productions, we find a most beautiful fiction in the phantom which defends the entrance of the Indian seas. In the comedies of Calderoni, and of Lopez de Vega, an elevation of sentiment always shines through the cloud of faults by which their beauties are veiled. The love and jealousy of the Spaniards have quite a different character from the sentiments represented in the Italian pieces ; their expressions are neither very subtil, though not entirely insipid ; they never portray perfidy of character nor depravity of manners : it is true, they have too much pompousness of style ; but while we condemn their bombast, we are convinced of the truth of their sentiments. It is not the same in Italy : if the affectation of certain works were taken away, there would remain nothing at all : while, if we

could remove that of the Spaniards, they would shortly attain to the perfection of dignity, courage, and the most affecting sensibility.

It was not possible that the elements of philosophy could be improved in Spain; the invasion of the north introduced nothing but the military spirit: and the Arabians were altogether enemies to philosophy: their absolute government, and the fatality of their religion, led them to detest the light of philosophy: this hatred caused them to burn the library of Alexandria. They however cultivated the sciences and poetry: but they studied the former like astrologers, and the latter like warriors. They cultivated their vocal talents, merely to sing their exploits; and they studied nature only with the hopes of attaining the magic art. They had no idea of strengthening their reason: and in reality, to what use could they have applied a faculty which would have overthrown what they most respected, despotism and superstition!

The Spaniards, strangers like the Italians to the labors of philosophy, were entirely diverted from all literary emulation by the gloomy and oppressive tyranny of the Inquisition. They drew no profit from the inexhaustible sources of poetic invention which the Arabians brought with them. Italy was in possession of the ancient monuments: was also immediately connected with the Greeks of Constantinople; and drew from Spain the Oriental style, which the Moors had introduced, but which the Spaniards neglected.

We may easily distinguish, in the Italian literature, what has arisen from the influence of the Greeks, and what belongs to the poetry and tradition of the Arabians. Pedantry and affectation were derived from the sophistry and theology of the Greeks, and the picture of poetic invention from the Oriental imagination. These two different characters may be distinctly perceived through the general character which the same language, the same climate, and similar manners, gave to the works of the same people.

Boiardo the first author who wrote in that style rendered so celebrated by Ariosto, displayed a great similarity in his poems to the Oriental tales; the same character of the inventive and the marvelous. Indeed, the spirit of chivalry, and the liberty granted to women in the north, constitute the only difference between Boiardo and the 'Thousand and One Nights.'

Although the Arabians were a warlike people, they fought for religion much more than for love or honor; while with the people of the north, whatever might be their respect for the belief they professed, personal glory was ever their first aim. Ariosto, as well as Boiardo, is an imitator of the Oriental style. Ariosto is certainly the greatest painter, and consequently, perhaps, the greatest poet amongst the moderns. One of the most striking originalities in his works is the art of extracting pleasantries from what is not only serious but bombastic. Nothing could be more agreeable to the Italians than this lively ridicule thrown upon all the serious and elevated notions of chivalry; it is natural to them to be fond of uniting, even in subjects of the highest importance, an exterior of gravity with levity of sentiments: and Ariosto is the most charming model of this national taste.

Tasso borrowed his most brilliant ideas from the Oriental imagination, but often joined with them a charm of sensibility peculiar to himself. Petrarch, the first poet of whom the Italians could boast, and one of those who was most admired, introduced that unfortunate style of antithesis and *conceits*, of which the Italian literature in many instances could never after be entirely corrected. All the poetical productions of the school of Petrarch and we must admit into the number the *Aminta* of Tasso, and the *Pastor Fido* of Guarini, drew their defects from the sophistry of the *Greeks of the middle century*. The spirit with which they animated their theology, was introduced by the

Italians into their poems on the subject of love. There is some analogy between love and devotion; but there certainly can exist none between theology and the sentiments of the heart: nevertheless, at Constantinople they disputed in the same style upon the nature of the divinity, as in Italy upon the partiality or severity of their mistresses.\*

All Europe, and France in particular, were in danger of losing the advantages of natural genius by imitating the writings of the Italians; the beauties which immortalized their poets, depended upon the imagination, the language, the climate, and a variety of circumstances which could not be transported elsewhere; but their defects were very contagious.

Affectation is, of all the faults incident to characters or writings, that which in the most irreparable manner checks the source of all good: even truth, when thus arrayed, sickens the mind, and we turn from it with disgust.

The language which has been employed in false ideas and cold exaggerations, becomes rapid if continued, and may at length lose the power of causing even the slightest emotion, if too often repeated upon the same subject; for this reason the Italian is, perhaps, of all the European languages, the least adapted for the passionate eloquence of love; as that of the French is now exhausted in declamations upon liberty.

At the same time that Petrarch introduced into his poetry a romantic exaggeration. Boccaccio adopted another extreme, and threw into his works the greatest indecency: and we may observe, that most of the Italian comedies are infinitely more obscene than any composed by the French authors. One of the destructive consequences of that affectation of sentiment is to inspire a taste for the opposite extreme, in order to rouse the mind from a languor and disgust which this sentimental tone never fails to occasion. The affectation of love leads the mind to licentiousness; as hypocrisy in religion generally ends in atheism: nevertheless, Petrarch and a few other celebrated poets who wrote in that style, are worthy of being read from the beauties of their harmonious language, which recalls to our minds in a degree the effects of that celestial music, with which it is so often accompanied: but it is not affirmed, that these sonorous words would be an advantage to all kinds of style, or to every description of poetry.

The brilliant consonance of the Italian language is not favorable to thought, either in the writer or the reader: there is not a sufficient conciseness in the ideas, nor enough of gloom to express the melancholy of sentiment; it is a language whose melody is so extraordinary, that even without giving attention to the sense of the words, it strikes and affects the mind like the chords of a musical instrument. Every one must be transported in reading this verse of Tasso:

Chiama gli arbitror del ombre eterne  
Il rauco suon della Tartarea tromba,  
Tremar le spaziose atri caverne,  
E l'aer cieco a quel ramor rimbomba.†

Yet when we examine the sense of it, we cannot find any thing sublime. Tasso like an able musician,

\* Among a thousand instances of Italian affectation, I shall mention one.—Petrarch lost his mother when she was only thirty-eight years old; he then composed a sonnet in a manner assuredly most affecting and natural consisting exactly of thirty-eight verses, in honor of her memory, as well as to testify his own regret at having lost his mother at that comparatively early age.

† When the hoarse sound of the Tartarean trumpet called the inhabitants of the eternal shades, the vast and gloomy caverns trembled, while the tremendous roar was extended far and wide through the gloomy air.

takes possession of the imagination. In this stanza he makes his hearers tremble by the harmony of numbers, and the grandeur of sounds ; but one of the fine airs of Jiomelli would produce nearly a similar effect. This is the advantage of the Italian language, and we will now remark its inconvenience.

The death of Clorinda, murdered by Tancred, is perhaps the most affecting recital we are acquainted with in poetry : and the inexpressible beauties of the episode in Tasso, add still more to the effect ; nevertheless the last verse of this composition,

*Passa la bella donna, et par che dorma, \**

is too soft and harmonious ; it glides too smoothly upon the mind to accord with the profound expression such an event ought to produce.

The great number who have distinguished themselves by their facility in versification, has been cited as a proof of the poetical advantages of the Italian language ; but it appears to me quite the reverse, and that this its extreme facility is one of its faults : great poets must find it an obstacle to the elevation and perfection of their style. The gradations of thought, and the shades of sentiment, require a profound meditation ; while those agreeable words which offer themselves in such crowds to the fancy of the Italian poets, like a court of flatterers, dispense with the search, and by that means preclude the discovery of a real friend.

In Italy, every thing conspired to fill the life of man with the agreeable sensations which naturally arise from their fine arts and their unclouded sun ; but since this country has lost the empire of the world, it seems as if its inhabitants disdained a political existence ; and, according to the maxims of Cæsar, they aspired to the first rank in pleasure, rather than the second place in the annals of fame,

Dante having, as well as Machiavel, supported a character in the civil commotions of his country ; in some of his poems we observe an energy in no degree analogous to the literature of his time : but the numberless faults with which we may reproach him, belonged without doubt to the century he lived in. It is only in the time of Leo X. that we remark a decided purity in the Italian literature : the ascendancy of this prince was to the Italian government what unity might have been : the rays of knowledge were collected into one focus, in which taste also might have been concentrated, and literary judgments have proceeded from the same tribunal.

After the age of the Medici, the Italian literature made no progress of any kind, either because some central point was necessary to rally all the forces of the intellect, or, principally, because philosophy was not at all cultivated in Italy. When the literature of imagination has attained to the highest possible degree of perfection, the subsequent age belongs to philosophy, in order that the human understanding may not cease in its advancement towards perfection in some way or other. After Racine, we have seen Voltaire ; because, in the eighteenth century, men were more profound thinkers than in the seventeenth. But what could have been added to the excellence of poetry after Racine ?

The Italians have no romances like those of the French and English ; because the love which inspired them, not being a passion of the mind capable of any long continuation, their customs and manners were too licentious to preserve any interest in this style. Their comedies were filled with that kind of buffoonery which arises from the absurdities and vices : but we do not find, if we except a few pieces of Goldoni, one striking

\* The beautiful nymph expired while seeming only to sleep.

and variegated picture of the vices of the human heart, such as are found in the French comedies. The Italians simply wished to create laughter ; no serious aim can be discovered through the veil of flippancy, and their comedies are not the picture of human life, but its caricature.

The Italians, even in their theatres, have often turned their priests into ridicule, although in other respects they were entirely subjected to them : but it was not with a philosophical view that they attacked the abuses of religion : they had not, like some of our writers, a wish to reform the faults they complained of : it was easy to perceive that their real opinions were totally opposite to that kind of authority to which they were compelled to submit : but this spirit of opposition incited them to nothing more than a contempt for those who commanded esteem ; it was like the cunning of children to their teachers ; they were willing to obey them on condition they might be permitted to make sport of them.

It follows from this, that all the works of the Italians, except those which treat on physical sciences, have nothing useful in view ; which is absolutely necessary in order to give a real strength and solidity to their reflections. The works of Beccaria, Filangieri, and a few others, make the only exception to what I have now advanced.

One question more remains to be decided before I close this chapter ; which is, whether the Italians have carried the dramatic art to any length in tragedy ?

For myself, in spite of the charms of Metastasio, and the energy of Alfieri, I do not think they have. The Italians have a lively invention in subjects, and a brilliancy in expression ; but the personages which they represent, are not characterized in a manner to leave any lasting traces on the mind ; and the affliction which they portray, excites but little sympathy. This may be occasioned by their moral and political situation, not allowing the mind its full display : their sensibility is not serious, their sadness is without melancholy, and their grandeur commands no respect. The Italian author was therefore obliged to have recourse entirely to himself ; and, to compose a tragedy, he must not only forget all he sees, but renounce all his habitual ideas and impressions : and it is very difficult to find out the true basis of a tragedy which is so widely different from the general manners and customs of the time in which it was composed.

Vengeance is the passion which is the best described in the Italian tragedies : it is natural to their character to be suddenly roused by this sentiment in the midst of that habitual indolence in which they spent their lives ; and their resentments were naturally expressed, because they really felt them.

The operas alone were followed, because at the opera was heard that enchanting music which was the glory and pleasure of Italy. The performers did not exert themselves in tragedy ; fine acting would have been thrown away ; they were not even heard ; and it must ever be thus, when the art of touching the passions is not carried to a sufficient length to predominate over every other pleasure. The Italians did not require to be softened, and the authors for want of spectators, and the spectators for want of authors, did not give themselves up to the profound impressions of the dramatic art.

Metastasio, however, found out the secret of turning his operas almost into tragedies ; and though compelled to struggle with all the difficulties imposed by the obligation of submitting to music, he still preserved many beauties of style and situation truly dramatic. It may be that there exist yet some other exceptions little known to strangers ; but to draw the principal characters of any national literature, it is absolutely necessary to lay aside many details ; there are no general ideas that are not contradicted by certain exceptions ; but the mind would be incapable of ever forming any

termination, if it were to stop at each particular instead of drawing a consequence from a collective whole.

Melancholy, that sentiment which is so fertile in works of genius, appears to have belonged almost exclusively to the people of the North. The Oriental style, which the Italians have often imitated, had a sort of melancholy of which we find some traces in the Arabian poetry, and likewise in the Hebrew psalms; but it has a character entirely distinct from that we shall find when we analyze the literature of the north.

The people of the east, whether Jews or Mahometans, were sustained and directed by their positive reliance on their religion. It was not that uncertain and undetermined apprehension which afforded the mind a more philosophical impression: the melancholy of the Orientals was that of men who were happy from every enjoyment of nature; they simply reflected with regret upon the brevity of human life, and the rapid decay of prosperity: while the melancholy of the people of the north was that which is inspired by the sufferings of the mind, the void which the absence of sensibility makes in the existence, and that continual musing upon the calamities of this life, and the uncertainty of their destiny in a life to come.

## CHAPTER XI.

### OF THE LITERATURE OF THE NORTH.

There appear to be two distinct kinds of literature still extant, one derived from the east, the other from the north; the origin of the first may be traced to Homer, that of the last to Ossian. The Greeks, the Latins, the Italians, the Spanish, and the French of the century of Louis XIV., belong to that style of literature which I shall call eastern. The works of the English and Germans, with some of the Danish and Swedish writings, may be classed as the literature of the north. But before I attempt to characterize the English and German writers, I think it necessary, in a general manner, to consider the principal difference of the two hemispheres of their literature.

The English, as well as the Germans, have, without doubt, often imitated the ancients, and drawn very useful lessons from that fruitful study; but their original beauties carry a sort of resemblance, a certain poetic grandeur, of which Ossian is the most splendid example.

It may perhaps be remarked, that the English poets are celebrated for the spirit of philosophy which appears in all their works; and that the ideas of Ossian are not the ideas of reflection, but a series of events and impressions. I answer to this objection, that the most habitual images and ideas of Ossian are those which recall the shortness of life, the respect for the dead, the superstition connected with their memory, and the duty that remains towards those who are no more. If the poet has not united to those sentiments, morals, maxims, or philosophical reflections; it was because the human understanding, at that period, was not yet capable of the abstraction necessary to draw philosophical inferences; but the emotion caused by the songs of Ossian, disposed the mind to the most profound meditations.

Melancholy poetry is that which accords best with philosophy. Depression of spirits leads us to penetrate more deeply into the character and destiny of man, than any other disposition of the mind. The English poets who succeeded the Scots bards, added to their descriptions those very ideas and reflections which those descriptions ought to have given birth to: but they have preserved, from the fine imagination of the north, that *gloom which is soothed with the roaring of the sea, and the hollow blast that rages on the barren heath, and, in short, every thing dark and dismal, which can*

force a mind dissatisfied with its existence here, to look forward to another state. The vivid imagination of the people of the north darting beyond the boundaries of a world whose confines they inhabited, penetrated through the black cloud that obscured their horizon, and seemed to represent the dark passage to eternity.

We cannot decide in a general manner between the two different styles of poetry, of which we may fairly say Homer and Ossian were the first models: my general impressions, and the force of my ideas, induce me to give a preference to the literature of the north; but my business at present is, to examine the decided difference of their characters.

The climate is certainly one of the principal causes of difference which existed between the images that pleased in the north and those which were admired in the east. The reveries of poets may produce extraordinary objects; but the impressions of habits are necessary in their compositions of every kind. To banish the remembrance of those impressions, would be to lose the greatest advantage, namely, that of portraying what they had themselves experienced.

The poets of the east intermingled with all their sentiments of life the ideas of tufted woods, limpid streams, and cooling zephyrs: they could not even describe the enjoyments of the heart, without introducing the idea of the sequestered bowers which preserved them from the scorching rays of their meridian sun. The bounty of nature by which they were surrounded, excited more emotion than thought.

He who said that the passions were more violent in the east than in the north, was, I think, wrong: it is true, we may see a greater variety of interests, but we perceive less ardor in the same sentiments.

The people of the north were less engaged in pleasure than in its opposite sensation; and this rendered their imagination more fertile: the prospects of nature had almost unbounded influence over them; but it affected them as it appeared in their climate, always dark and gloomy. Without doubt, many circumstances in life might sometimes vary this disposition to melancholy; but that alone stamps the character of the national spirit. We must look, in a nation, as well as in an individual, for the leading characteristic; all others may be the effects of chance, and depend on a thousand different circumstances; but this one alone characterizes the man.

The northern poetry was much more suitable than the eastern to the minds of a free people. The Athenians, who were the first inventors of eastern literature, were more jealous of their independence than any nation in the world: nevertheless, they were much more easily subdued to slavery than the people of the north; their love of the arts, the beauty of their climate, and the numberless enjoyments bestowed on the Athenians might, in a great measure, recompense for their want of liberty. But independence was the sole happiness of the northern nations: a certain haughtiness of soul, and indifference to life, which was inspired by their gloomy atmosphere and the rarity of their sun, would have rendered servitude insupportable: and long before the theory of constitutions, and the advantages of a representative government were known in England, the warlike spirit which shone with so much enthusiasm in the Erse and Scandinavian poetry, inspired man with a prodigious idea of his own strength and the power of his will. Independence existed for each one separately, before liberty was generally constituted.

At the revival of letters, philosophy first commenced with the northern nations; in whose religious habits reason found much less superstition to oppose than in those of the southern people. The ancient poetry of the north is infected with much less superstition than the Grecian mythology: there are a few absurd fables



in the Edda; but almost all the religious ideas of the north owe their birth to exalted reason: the ghosts bending from the clouds, were but animated remembrances presented by sensibility.

The emotions which are produced by the poems of Ossian, may be re-produced in all countries and in all nations; because the means of awakening them are all taken from nature: but it must be talents of the highest order that could without affectation introduce the Grecian mythology into French poetry. There is nothing, generally speaking, that can appear more cold or insipid, than the dogmas of any religion, when transported into a country where there are only received as ingenious metaphors.

The poetry of the north was rarely allegorical; not one of its effects stood in need of local superstition to strike the imagination. A reflected enthusiasm, and a pure exaltation of mind, might equally be found in every nation: it is the true poetic inspiration, a sentiment which is in every heart, but the expression of which is the gift of genius alone. It creates a kind of celestial rousing, which excites a love of solitude and the country, and often fills the mind with truly religious ideas.

Whatever is great and sublime, we owe to the painful sentiments of the imperfection of our nature: moderate understandings are in general satisfied with the common occurrences of life; they in a manner bring their existence to a period, and supply what is wanting by the illusions of vanity. But sublime sentiments and actions spring from the desire which great souls have of breaking those bounds which circumscribe the imagination. The heroism of morals, the enthusiasm of eloquence, and the ambition of fame, are supernatural enjoyments, necessary only to those minds which, at once exalted and melancholy, are wearied and disgusted with every thing transitory, and to which the idea of bounds is insupportable, though placed at ever so great a distance. This disposition of the mind, which is the source of every generous passion and every philosophical discovery, is excited in the most lively manner by the poetry of the north.

I am very far from wishing to compare the genius of Homer with that of Ossian. What we know of Ossian's, cannot properly be considered as a work; it is merely a collection of popular songs, which were sung in the mountains of Scotland. Before Homer composed his poems, without doubt, some ancient traditions existed in Greece. The poetry of Ossian is no farther advanced in the poetic art, than were the songs of the Greeks before the time of Homer. No comparison can, then, with justice be made between the Iliad and the poem of Fingal. But we may always judge whether the images of nature, such as they were represented in the latter, excited as noble and pure emotions as those of the north, or whether the imagery of the east, more brilliant in many respects, gave birth to so many ideas, which are immediately connected with the sentiment of the heart. Philosophical ideas naturally unite themselves to gloomy reflections, and the poetry of the east, far from according, like that of the north, with meditation, and inspiring what reflection ought to feel, excludes almost every idea of a noble and elevated nature.

Ossian is reproached with his monotony: this fault exists much less in the different English and German poems which have imitated his style. Cultivation, industry, and commerce, have varied the face of the country in many ways; nevertheless, the northern imagination always preserving nearly the same character, we can still find a sort of uniformity in Young, Thomson, Klopstock, and others.

There cannot be an endless variety in melancholy poetry: that deep emotion which thrills the blood, is a sensation that never varies. When this emotion is excited by poetry, it has a great analogy to the effects

produced by the *harmonica*. When the mind, gently agitated, is willing to prolong the pleasing sensation while it is possible to support it; when we are enervated, the fault is not to be attributed to the poetry, but to the susceptibility and weakness of our organs; what we experience at that time, is not a disgust at the monotony, but the fatigue of a pleasure too long continued.

The grand effects of the English dramatics, and after them that of the German, were not borrowed from Grecian subjects, nor from mythological dogmas. The English and Germans excite terror by other superstitions more suitable to the credulity of the last centuries; above all, they have found the art of exciting it by the pictures of distress which was so forcibly felt by energetic minds. The effect which the ideas of death generally produce in the sentiments of men, depend, in a great measure, as I have observed before, upon their religious opinions. The Scottish bards have, at all times, had a more spiritual and gloomy devotion than those of the east: but the Christian religion, which, when divested of priestcraft, is nearly a-kin to pure Deism, banished that train of terrors with which imagination had surrounded men in the hour of death. The ancients peopled all nature with protecting beings: the forests and rivers were filled with inhabitants, which presided over the night as well as the day; nature had retired into solitude, and men's fears were increased. The Christian religion, the most philosophical of all others, is that which leaves man the most at his own disposal.

The tragic writers of the north, not always contented with the effects which sprung naturally from the representation of the affections of the heart, called to their aid ghosts and spectres; a superstition suited to their gloomy imagination; but however great the terror which may be produced by such means, it is always rather a fault than a beauty.

The talent of the dramatic poet augments by existing in a nation not too much given to credulity; because it is then a matter of necessity to search into the human heart for the source of that emotion which is felt from an elegant expression, a sentiment from the heart: solitary remorse, or any of those frightful phantoms which strike the imagination, the marvelous may surprise and astonish: but in whatever fashion it may appear, it can never equal the impression of a natural event, when that event collects all that can move the affections of the soul: for example, the furies pursuing Orestes is less horrid to the mind than the sleep of Lady Macbeth.

If we are to judge by the traditions in our possession, the southern nations had in all times a respect for women, which was entirely unknown to the people of the east: they seem to have enjoyed independence in the north, while in other parts of the world they were condemned to slavery:—this most probably is one of the principal causes of that sensibility which characterizes northern literature.

The history of love, in all countries, may be considered in a philosophical point of view. It seems as if the representation of this passion ought to depend entirely on the feelings of the writer who expresses it; but such is the ascendancy which the reigning manners and customs have over the writers, that they submit to them even the language of their inmost sentiments. It is possible that Petrarca might have felt this passion more strongly than the author of 'Werter,' or many English poets, for instance, Pope, Thomson, Otway, &c. Nevertheless, in reading the writings of the north, we might be led to think men were of a different nature, and that they lived in another world. The perfection of some of this poetry proves beyond a doubt the genius of its author: but it is not less certain, that had those authors lived in Italy, their writings would not have been the same, even if they had felt similar



passions; so true, it is, that in all literary works where aim is success, we find much less of the real character of the writer than the general spirit of his nation, and that of the century in which he lived.

It was the Protestant religion which inspired the modern people of the north with a more general spirit of philosophy than was possessed by those of the east. The reformation was certainly the epoch of history which essentially promoted the perfectibility of the human species. The Protestant religion contains no active seeds of superstition; while it gives to virtue every support which can be drawn from wisdom. In those countries where the Protestant religion is predominant, it maintains purity of manners, and does not in the least retard the progress of philosophy.

A greater development of this question would be foreign to my subject; but I leave it to the discussion of every enlightened thinker, whether, if there could exist a means of uniting morality with the ideas of a god, without this means becoming an instrument of power in the hands of men; and whether a religion thus founded, would not be the greatest happiness that could be insured to human nature!—to that nature which is so much to be pitied, and which every day breaks some tie formed by affection, delicacy, or goodness.

## CHAPTER XII.

### OF THE PRINCIPAL FAULTS WHICH THE FRENCH COMPLAIN OF IN THE LITERATURE OF THE NORTH.

The French censure the literature of the north as deficient in taste. Northern writers reply, that this taste is an arbitrary legislation, which often deprives sentiments and ideas of their original beauties. But it appears to me, that there may exist a medium between these opinions: the rules of taste are not arbitrary, and we must not confound the principles and basis upon which universal truth is founded, with the modifications caused by local circumstances. The duties of virtue, that code of principles which is supported by the unanimous consent of the world, experience some small change from the manners and customs of different nations; and although the first principles remain the same, the estimation of many virtues varies according to the habits and forms of government.

If it may be permitted to compare taste with what is greatest among men, we might say it was also fixed in the general principles.

It has often been asked, Must genius be sacrificed to taste? Undoubtedly it must not: but taste does not require the sacrifice of genius. We often find, in the literature of the north, something ridiculous annexed to something of great beauty: what belongs to taste in such writings, is their beauties; and what ought to have been suppressed, was what taste condemned. There exists no necessary connection between defects and beauties but what arises from the weakness of human nature; which does not permit us to remain always at the same pitch of perfection.

Faults are not the natural consequence of beauties: and although they may be overlooked; so far from adding any brilliancy to talents, they often weaken the impression they ought to produce.

If it was a question, which was most to be preferred, a work in which there were great beauties and great faults, or a work of the middling kind perfectly correct; I would answer without the least hesitation, that we ought to prefer a work where there existed even one spark of genius. It is a weakness in any nation to attach itself only to the ridiculous; which is so easy to seize or to avoid; instead of searching into the characters of men, which would open the understanding

and elevate the mind. A negative merit can afford no enjoyment: but there are many people who require nothing more in life than to be exempt from pain: or in writings, but to be exempt from faults; and, in short, an exemption in every thing: but strong minds wish for an active existence; to attain which, in matters of literature, they must meet with new ideas or passionate sentiments.

There are some works in the French language, in which we may find beauties of the first order, without the intermixture of bad taste; and those are the only models in which every literary quality is united.

Amongst the learned men of the north there existed a sort of caprice, that might be said to belong more to their party-spirit than to their judgment: they were attached to the faults of their writers almost as much as their beauties: while they might have observed, as a woman of sense once did in speaking of the weakness of some hero, *'It is not the cause of his greatness, but he is great in spite of it.'*

In works of imagination, men mostly seek for agreeable impressions: taste then is nothing more than the art of knowing and foreseeing what may awaken those impressions. If you recall disgusting images, you excite unpleasant sensations, the reality of which every one would shun: and when, by the representation of scenes horrible in themselves, you change moral terror into physical fear; you lose all the charm of imitation, and excite nothing but a nervous commotion: and you may lose the power of causing even this painful sensation, if you try to carry it too far. For it is with the theatre as it is in life: when the exaggeration is perceived, we disregard even the reality. If you lengthen the development, or if you put an obscurity in the discourse, and an improbability in the event; you suspend or destroy the interest by fatiguing the attention. If you represent heroic personages in a base and ignoble point of view, it is to be feared you will find it difficult to resume the theatrical illusion: it is of a nature so extremely delicate, that the lightest circumstance may awaken the spectators from their enchantment. In simplicity, ideas gain rest and strength: but what is base and low, may prevent even the possibility of again feeling interested in what is noble and elevated.

The beauties of Shakspeare may triumph in England over his faults: but they are a great drawback to his fame with other nations. Surprise is certainly a great means of adding to theatrical effect: but it would be ridiculous to conclude from that, that every tragic scene should be preceded by a comic scene, in order to heighten the astonishment by the contrast. Surprise should spring from grandeur itself, and not from its opposition to meanness. *Shades*, but not *blemishes*, are necessary, in every style of painting, to raise the brilliancy of coloring; and the same principles should be followed in literature: Nature offers us the model and a good taste should be but a reflection from our observation of it.

These developments might be carried much farther; but I think they are sufficient to prove that taste in literature never exacts the sacrifice of any enjoyment, but, on the contrary, it indicates the means of augmenting them: and so far from the principles of taste being incompatible with genius, it is in studying it that they were first discovered.

I will not reproach Shakspeare with having set aside all rules of the art; they are infinitely less important than those of taste; because the one prescribes what must be done, while the other only forbids what must be avoided. It is impossible to prescribe limits to the different combinations of a man of genius; he may perhaps strike into some path entirely new, without missing the aim he set out upon. The rules of art are a calculation of probabilities upon the means of success: and if this success is obtained, it is of little importance

have submitted to them. But it is not the same with the rules of taste ; to despise them, is to relinquish all beauties, even the beauties of nature ; and they can never be surpassed.

Let us not then say that Shakspeare knew how to excel without taste, and to show himself superior to the regulations prescribed by his country ; but let us acknowledge, on the contrary, that he displayed his taste in his sublimities, and was most deficient in it when he was least sublime.

### CHAPTER XIII.

#### OF THE TRAGEDIES OF SHAKSPEARE.

The English entertain as profound veneration and enthusiasm for Shakspeare, as any nation perhaps has ever felt for any writer. A free people have a natural love for every thing that can do honor to their country ; and this sentiment ought to exclude every species of criticism.

There are beauties of the first order to be found in Shakspeare, relating to every country and every period of time. His faults are those which belonged to the times in which he lived ; and the singularities then so prevalent among the English, are still represented with the greatest success upon their theatres. These beauties and eccentricities I shall proceed to examine, as connected with the national spirit of England, and the genius of the literature of the north.

Shakspeare did not imitate the ancients ; nor, like Racine did he feed his genius upon the Grecian tragedies. He composed one piece upon a Greek subject, *Troilus and Cressida* ; in which the manners in the time of Homer are not at all observed. He excelled infinitely more in those tragedies which were taken from Roman subjects. But history, and the lives of Plutarch, which Shakspeare appears to have read with the utmost attention, are not purely a literary study ; we may therein trace the man almost to a state of existence. When an author is solely penetrated with the models of the dramatic art of antiquity, and when he imitates imitations, he must of course have less originality : he cannot have that genius which draws from nature ; that immediate genius, if I may so express myself, which so particularly characterizes Shakspeare. From the times of the Greeks down to this time, we see every species of literature derived one from another, and all arising from the same source. Shakspeare opened a new field of literature : it was borrowed, without doubt, from the general spirit and color of the north : but it was Shakspeare who gave to the English literature its impulse, and to their dramatic art its character.

A nation which has carved out its liberty through the horrors of civil war, and whose passions have been strongly agitated, is much more susceptible of the emotion excited by Shakspeare, than that which is caused by Racine. When misfortune lies heavy and for a long time upon a nation, it creates a character, which even succeeding prosperity can never entirely efface. Shakspeare, although he has since been equalled by both English and German authors, was the first who painted moral affliction in the highest degree : the bitterness of those sufferings of which he gives us the idea, might pass for the phantoms of imagination, if nature did not recognize her own picture in them.

The ancients believed in a fatality, which came upon them with the rapidity of lightning, and destroyed them like a thunderbolt. The moderns, and more especially Shakspeare, found a much deeper source of emotion in a philosophical distress, which was often composed of irreparable misfortunes of ineffectual exertions, and blighted hopes. But the ancients inhabited a world yet in its infancy ; were in possession of but very few histories ; and withal were so sanguine in

respect to the future, that the scenes of distress painted by them, could never be so heart-rending as those in the English tragedies.

The terror of death was a sentiment, the effects of which, whether for religion or from stoicism, was seldom displayed by the ancients. Shakspeare has represented it in every point of view : he makes us feel that dreadful emotion which chills the blood of him, who, in the full enjoyment of life and health, learns that death awaits him. In the tragedies of Shakspeare, the criminal and the virtuous, infancy and old-age are alike condemned to die, and express every emotion natural to such a situation. What tenderness do we feel, when we hear the complaints of Arthur, a child condemned to death by the order of King John ; or when the assassin Tirrel comes to relate to Richard III. the peaceful slumber of the children of Edward ? When a hero is painted just going to be deprived of his existence, the grandeur of his character, and the recollection of his achievements, excite the greatest interest : but when men of weak minds, and doomed to an inglorious destiny, are represented as condemned to perish ; such as Henry VI., Richard II., and King Lear ; the great debates of nature between existence and non-existence absorb the whole attention of the spectators. Shakspeare knew how to point with genius that mixture of physical emotions and moral reflections which are inspired by the approach of death, when no intoxicating passion deprives man of his intellectual faculties.

Another sentiment which Shakspeare alone knew how to render theatrical, was pity unmixed with admiration for those who suffer ;\* pity for an insignificant being,† and sometimes for a contemptible one.‡ There must be infinity of talent to be able to convey this sentiment from real life to the stage and to preserve it in all its force : but when once it is accomplished, the effect which it produces is more nearly allied to reality than any other. It is for the man alone that we are interested, and not by sentiments which are often but a theatrical romance : it is by a sentiment so nearly approaching the impressions of life, that the illusion is still the greater.

Even when Shakspeare represents personages whose career has been illustrious, he draws the interest of the spectators towards them by sentiments purely natural. The circumstances are grand, but the men differ less from other men than those in the French tragedies. Shakspeare makes you penetrate entirely into the glory which he paints ; in listening to him, you pass through all the different shades and gradations which lead to heroism ; and you arrive at the height without perceiving any thing unnatural.

The national pride of the English, that sentiment displayed in their jealous love of liberty, disposed them much less to enthusiasm for their chiefs than that spirit of chivalry which existed in the French monarchy. In England, they wish to recompense the services of a good citizen ; but they have no turn for that unbounded ardor which existed in the habits, the institutions, and the character of the French. That haughty repugnance to unlimited obedience, which at all times characterized the English nation, was probably what inspired their national poet with the idea of assailing the passions of his audience by pity rather than by admiration. The tears which were given by the French to the sublime characters of their tragedies, the English author drew forth for private sufferings ; for those who were forsaken ; and for such a long list of the unfortunate, that we cannot entirely sympathize with Shakspeare's sufferers without acquiring also some of the bitter experience of real life.

But if he excelled in exciting pity ; what energy appeared in this terror ! It was from the crime itself

\* The death of Catherine of Arragon, in 'Henry VIII.'  
† The Duke of Clarence, in 'Richard III.'  
‡ Cardinal Wolsey, in 'Henry VIII.'

that he drew dismay and fear. It may be said of crimes painted by Shakspeare, as the bible says of leath, that he is the king of terrors. How skillfully combined are the remorse and the superstition which increases with that remorse in Macbeth.

Witchcraft is in itself much more terrible in its theatrical effect than the most absurd dogmas of religion. That which is unknown, or created by supernatural intelligence, awakens fear and terror to the highest degree. In every religious system, terror is carried only to a certain length, and is always at least founded upon some motive. But the chaos of the magic bewilders the mind. Shakspeare, in 'Macbeth,' admits of fatality, which was necessary in order to procure a pardon for the criminal; but he does not on account of this fatality dispense with the philosophical gradations of the sentiments of the mind. This piece would be still more admirable, if its grand effects were produced without the aid of the marvelous, although this marvelous consists, as one may say, only of phantoms of the imagination, which are made to appear before the eyes of the spectators. They are not mythological personages bringing their fictitious laws or their uninteresting nature amongst the interest of men: they are the marvelous effects of dreams, when the passions are strongly agitated. There is always something philosophical in the supernatural employed by Shakspeare. When the witches announce to Macbeth, that he is to wear the crown; and when they return to repeat their prediction, at the very moment when he is hesitating to follow the bloody counsel of his wife; who cannot see that it is the interior struggle of ambition and virtue which the author meant to represent under those hideous forms?

But he had not recourse to these means in 'Richard III.:' and yet he has painted him more criminal still than Macbeth; but his intention was to portray a character without any of those involuntary emotions, without struggles, without remorse, cruel and ferocious as the savage beasts which range the forests; and not as a man who, though at present guilty, had once been virtuous. The deep recesses of crimes were opened to the eyes of Shakspeare, and he descended into the gloomy abyss to observe their torments.

In England, the troubles and civil commotions which preceded their liberty, and which were always occasioned by their spirit of independence, gave rise much oftener than in France to great crimes and great virtues. There are in the English history many more tragical situations than in that of the French; and nothing opposes their exercising their talents upon national subjects.

Almost all the literature of Europe began with affectation. The revival of letters having commenced in Italy, the countries where they were afterwards introduced, naturally imitated the Italian style. The people of the north were much sooner enfranchised than the French in this studied mode of writing; the traces of which may be perceived in some of the ancient poets, as Waller, Cowley, and others. Civil wars and a spirit of philosophy have corrected this false taste, for misfortune, the impressions of which contain but too much variety, excludes all sentiments of affectation, and reason banishes all expressions that are deficient in justness.

Nevertheless, we find in Shakspeare a few of those studied turns connected even with the most energetic pictures of the passions. There are some imitations of the faults of Italian literature in 'Romeo and Juliet.:' but how nobly the English poet rises from this miserable style!—how well does he know now to describe love, even in the true spirit of the north!

In 'Othello,' love assumes a very different character from that which it bears in 'Romeo and Juliet.' But how grand, how energetic it appears! how beautifully Shakspeare has represented what forms the tie of the different sexes, courage and weakness! When Othello

protests before the Senate of Venice, that the only art which he had employed to win the affections of Desdemona were the perils to which he had been exposed; \* how every word he utters is felt by the female sex; their hearts acknowledge it all to be true. They know that it is not flattery, in which consists the powerful art of men to make themselves beloved, but the kind protection which they may afford the timid object of their choice; the glory which they may reflect upon their feeble life, is their most irresistible charm.

The manners and customs of the English relating to the existence of women, were not yet settled in the time of Shakspeare; political troubles had been a great hindrance to social habits. The rank which women held in tragedy, was then absolutely at the will of the author: therefore, Shakspeare, in speaking of them, sometimes uses the most noble language, that can be inspired by love, and at other times the lowest taste that was popular. This genius, given by passion, was inspired by it, as the priests were by their gods: they gave out oracles when they were agitated; but were no more than men, when calm.

Those pieces taken from the English history, such as the two upon Henry IV., that upon Henry V., and the three upon Henry VI., have an unlimited success in England: nevertheless I believe them to be much inferior in general to his tragedies of invention, 'King Lear,' 'Macbeth,' 'Hamlet,' 'Romeo and Juliet,' &c. The irregularities of time and place are much more remarkable. In short Shakspeare gives up to the popular taste in these, more than in any other of his works. The discovery of the press necessarily diminished the condescension of authors to the national taste: they paid more respect to the general opinion of Europe; and though it was of the greatest importance that those pieces which were to be played should meet with success at the representation, since a means was found out of extending their fame to other nations; the writers took more pains to shun those illusions and pleasantries which could please only the people of their own nation. The English, however, were very backward in submitting to the general good taste; their liberty being founded more upon national pride than philosophical ideas, they rejected every thing that came from strangers, both in literature and politics.

Before it would be possible to judge of the effects of an English tragedy, which might be proper for the French stage; an examination remains to be made, which is, to distinguish in the pieces of Shakspeare, that which was written to please the people; the real faults which he committed; and those spirited beauties which the severe rules of the French tragedies exclude from their stage.

The crowd of spectators in England require that comic scenes should succeed tragic effects. The contrast of what is noble with that which is not, as I have observed before, always produces a disagreeable impression upon men of taste. A noble style must have shades; but a too glaring opposition is nothing more than fantasticalness. That play upon words, those licentious equivocations, popular tales, and that string of proverbs, which are handed down from generation to generation, and are, as one may say, the patrimonial ideas of the common people; all these are applauded by the multitude, and censured by reason. These have no connection with the sublime effects which Shakspeare drew from simple words and common circumstances artfully arranged, which the French most absurdly would fear to bring upon their stage.

\* What charming verses are those which terminate the justification of Othello, and which La harpe has so ably translated into truth!

'She lov'd me for the dangers I had pass'd;  
And I lov'd her, that she did pity them.'—

Shakspeare.

'Elle aime mes malheurs, et j'aimai sa pitié.'

La Harpe.

Shakspeare, when he wrote the parts of vulgar minds in his tragedies, sheltered himself from the judgment of taste by rendering himself the object of popular admiration : he then conducted himself like an able chief, but not like a good writer.

The people of the north existed during many centuries, in a state that was at once both social and barbarous ; which left for a long time the vestiges of the *rude* and *ferocious*. Traces of this recollection are to be found in many of Shakspeare's characters, which are painted in the style that was most admired in those ages, in which they only lived for combats, physical power, and military courage.

We may also perceive in Shakspeare some of the ignorance of his century with regard to the principles of literature ; his powers are superior to the Greek tragedies for the philosophy of the passions, and the knowledge of mankind : \* but he was inferior to many with regard to the perfection of the art. Shakspeare may be reproached with incoherent images, prolixity, and useless repetitions : but the attention of the spectators in those days was too easily captivated, that the author should be very strict with himself. A dramatic poet, to attain all the perfection his talents will permit, must neither be judged by impaired age, nor by youth, who find the source of emotion within themselves.

The French have often condemned the scenes of horror represented by Shakspeare ; not because they excited an emotion too strong, but because they sometimes destroyed the theatrical illusion. They certainly appear to me susceptible of criticism. In the first place, there are certain situations which are only frightful ; and the bad imitators of Shakspeare wishing to represent them, produced nothing more than a disagreeable invention, without any of the pleasures which the tragedy ought to produce : and again, there are many situations really affecting in themselves, which nevertheless require stage effect to amuse the attention, and of course the interest.

When the governor of the tower, in which the young Arthur is confined, orders a red-hot iron to be brought, to put out his eyes ; without speaking of the atrociousness of such a scene, there must pass upon the stage an action, the imitation of which is impossible, and the attention of the audience is so much taken up with the execution of it, that the moral effect is quite forgotten.

The character of Caliban, in the 'Tempest,' is singularly original : but the almost animal figure, which his dress must give him, turns the attention from all that is philosophical in the conception of this part.

In reading 'Richard III.,' one of the beauties is what he himself says of his natural deformity. One can feel that the horror which he causes, ought to act reciprocally upon his own mind, and render it yet more atrocious. Nevertheless, can there be any thing difficult in an elevated style, or more nearly allied to ridicule, than the imitation of an ill-shaped man upon the stage ? Every thing in nature may interest the mind ; but upon the stage, the illusion of sight must be treated with the most scrupulous caution, or every serious effect will be irreparably destroyed.

Shakspeare also represented physical sufferings much too often. Philoctetes is the only example of any theatrical effect being produced by it ; and in this instance,

\* Among the great number of philosophical traits which are remarked even in the least celebrated works of Shakspeare, there is one with which I was singularly struck. In that piece entitled Measure for Measure, Lucien, the friend of Claudius, and brother to Isabella, presses her to go and sue for his pardon to the Governor Angelo, who had condemned this brother to die. Isabella, young and timid, answers, that she fears it would be useless ; that Angelo was too much irritated, and would be inflexible, &c. Lucien insists, and says to her,

—Our doubts are traitors,  
And make us lose the good we might win  
By fearing to attempt.

Who can have lived in a revolution and not be sensible of the truth of these words ?

it was the heroic cause of his wounds that fixed the attention of the spectators. Physical sufferings may be related, but cannot be represented. It is not the author, but the actor, who cannot express himself with grandeur ; it is not the ideas, but the senses, which refuse to lend their aid to this style of imitation.

In short, one of the greatest faults which Shakspeare can be accused of, is his want of simplicity in the intervals of his sublime passages. When he is not exalted, he is affected ; he wanted the art of sustaining himself, that is to say, of being as natural in his scenes of transition, as he was in the grand movements of the soul.

Otway, Rowe, and some other English poets, Addison excepted, all wrote their tragedies in the style of Shakspeare : and Otway's 'Venice Preserved,' almost equalled his model. But the two most truly tragical situations ever conceived by men, were first portrayed by Shakspeare :—madness caused by misfortune, and misfortune abandoned to solitude and itself.

Ajax is furious ; Orestes is pursued by the anger of the gods ; Phædra is consumed by the fever of love : but Hamlet, Ophelia, and King Lear, with different situations and different characters, have all, nevertheless, the same marks of derangement : it is distress alone that speaks in them ; every idea of common life disappears before this predominant one : they are alive to nothing but affection ; and this affecting delirium of a suffering object seems to set it free from that timidity which forbids us to expose ourselves without reserve to the eyes of pity. The spectators would perhaps refuse their sympathy to voluntary complaints ; but they readily yield to the emotion which arises from a grief that cannot answer for itself. Insanity, as portrayed by Shakspeare, is the finest picture of the shipwreck of moral nature, when the storm of life surpasses its strength.

It may be a question, whether the theatre of republican France, like the English theatre, will now admit of their heroes being painted with all their foibles, the virtues with their inconclusiveness, and common circumstances connected with elevated situations ? In short, will the tragic characters be taken from recollection, from human life, or from the *beautiful ideal* ?—This is a question which I propose to discuss after having spoken of the tragedies of Racine and Voltaire. I shall also examine, in the second part of this work, the influence which the French revolution is likely to have upon literature.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### OF ENGLISH PLEASANTRY.

We may distinguish many kinds of pleasantry in the literature of every country ; and nothing is better adapted to give an insight into the manners of a nation, than the character of gayety generally adopted by its writers. People are serious when alone : and they are gay for others, especially in their writings ; but they can excite laughter only by such ideas as are so familiar to those who listen to them, that they strike at the first instant, without the least effort of attention.

Although pleasantry cannot so easily pass in the esteem of a nation as a philosophical work ; it is necessarily submitted, like every thing else appertaining to the mind, to the judgment of universal good taste. It requires no little ingenuity to account for the causes of comic effect ; but it is by no means less true, that the general assent must be obtained for *chefs-d'œuvre* in this kind, as well as in all others.

The gayety which owes its birth to the inspiration of taste and genius, and that which is produced by the combination of understanding, and that species of

which the English call *humor*, have scarcely any connection the one with the other; nor have I included constitutional gayety in any of those already mentioned; because a great number of examples have proved, that it is no way connected with the talent of lively writing. Sprightliness may be easily assumed by every man who is endowed with wit; but it must be the genius of one man, and the good taste of many, to inspire genuine comedy.

I shall, in the subsequent chapter, endeavor to discover why the French only could attain that perfection of taste, grace, and quick penetration into the human heart, which produced the best works of Moliere: but at present let us search into the reason why the manners of the English are so opposite to the true genius of gayety.

Most part of the inhabitants of England, entirely engrossed by business, seek pleasure merely as a relaxation: and as hunger that is excited by fatigue, renders the appetite less difficult to please: so the English relish any thing that is presented to them: continual labor, whether mental or corporeal, disposes the mind to be contented with every kind of diversion. The severity of their religious ideas, their serious occupations, their domestic life, and their heavy atmosphere, render the English very liable to the malady of *ennui*: and it is for this reason, that the delicate amusements of the mind are not sufficient for them; they require some animated diversions to rouse them from their dejection:—and their authors either partake of the taste of the spectators, or conform themselves to it.

It requires an accurate observation of characters, to compose a good comedy. In order to develop the comic genius, it is necessary to live a great deal in society; to attach a great importance to the success they may meet with, in society: they must also know how to connect that multitude of interests which have their source in vanity, and which give vigor to every shaft of ridicule, as well as to every combination of self-love. The English are generally retired in their own families, or collected in public assemblies for the discussion of national affairs. The intermediate state called *society*, hardly exists among them: nevertheless, it is in this frivolous space of life that the refinements of taste are formed.

The English have not among themselves one comic author that can be compared to Moliere: and even if they did possess one, they would not be able fully to appreciate his merit. In such pieces as 'L'Avare,' 'Le Tartuffe,' 'Le Misanthrope,' which represent human nature as it is in all countries, there are many instances of delicate pleasantness and shades of self-love, which the English would not even perceive: they would not recognize themselves in such a piece, however natural it might be: they do not even imagine that they might be thus minutely described; their strong passions and important occupations make them consider life more generally.

There is to be found in Congreve a great deal of pleasantry and penetrating wit: but we never meet with one natural sentiment. By a most singular contradiction, the more simplicity and purity there are in the private manners of the English; the more they exaggerate the picture of vice in their comedies. The obscenity of Congreve's plays could never have been tolerated on the French theatre: we find in the dialogue many ingenious ideas; but the manners which they represent, were taken from some of the worst kind of French novels, which never in the smallest degree painted the manners of the French. Nothing can resemble the English less than their comedies. One would think that, intending to be gay, they had thought it necessary to depart as much as possible from their *natural character*; or that such was their profound respect for those sentiments which constituted the hap-

piness of domestic life, that they held them too sacred to admit of their being lavished upon the stage.

Congreve, and many of his imitators, heaped up immoralities without number, as well as without resemblance: their pictures are of no consequence with a nation such as the English, who amuse themselves with them as they would with tales or fantastical images of a world that was not their own. But the French comedies, in painting the real manners and customs of the times, might have an influence over them; for which reason, it becomes of the utmost consequence to impose severe rules on authors.

We rarely find, in the English comedies, characters which truly resemble the English; perhaps the dignity of a free people opposes with the English, as it did with the Romans, the representation of their manners upon the theatre: but the French willingly amuse themselves with their own foibles. Shakspeare, and some others, represented in their pieces some popular characters, such as Falstaff, Pistol, &c.; but they were so overcharged as almost entirely to exclude every resemblance. The common people of all nations are amused with vulgar pleasantries; but it is only in France where the most satirical gayety is at the same time the most delicate.

Mr Sheridan is the author of some comedies, in which the most brilliant and original wit appears in almost every scene. But, besides that *one* exception changes nothing in the general consideration, we must still make a distinction between a lively turn of mind and that species of gayety of which Moliere is the model. An author of my country who is capable of conceiving a great number of ideas, is sure of acquiring the art of opposing them in an agreeable manner to each other: but as the antitheses are not composed solely of eloquence, the contrasts are not the only secrets of gayety; and there is in the gayety of some of the French authors something at once the most natural, and the most inexplicable: the *thought* may be analyzed, but it is not produced by thought alone; it is a sort of electricity, communicated by the general spirit of the nation.

Gayety and eloquence are only connected so far as an involuntary inspiration carries the writer or the speaker to any degree of perfection in the one or the other. The spirit of the nation in which we live, develops the power of persuasion or of pleasantry much better than study and reflection can do. Sensations are produced from without; and every talent that depends immediately upon the sensations, requires an impulse from others. Gayety and eloquence are not the simple results of combination: to obtain success in talents of this sort, we must be agitated, we must be modified by the emotion from which either the one or the other might arise. But the disposition of the English in general, does not excite their writers to any species of gayety.

Swift, in his 'Gulliver,' and his 'Tale of a Tub,' like Voltaire in his works of philosophy, drew some of his most happy pleasantries from the opposition existing betwixt received errors and proscribed truths, betwixt institutions and the nature of things. The illusions, the allegories, the fictions of the mind, and all the disguises which it assumes, are so many combinations from which gayety may be produced; and, in every kind of style, the efforts of thought go a great way, though they can never amount to the facility of habit, or the unexpected happiness of spontaneous impressions.

Nevertheless, there is in some of the English writings a sort of gayety which has every character of originality and nature. To express this same gayety, which arises from the constitution nearly as much as from the mind, the English language has created a word, and called it *humor*: it is entirely dependent upon the climate, and the national manners; and would be altogether inimit-

ble, where the same causes tended to develop it. Certain pieces of Fielding and Swift, 'Peregrine Pickle,' 'Roderick Random,' but more especially Sterne's works, give a complete idea of the style called *humor*.

There is a moroseness, I could almost say a gloominess, in this sort of gayety: the person who makes you smile, does not himself feel the smallest degree of the pleasure he communicates to others: you may easily perceive that he was melancholy when he wrote, and that he would be almost angry with you for being amused. But as praise is sometimes the more agreeable for being given under a rough form; so the gayety of pleasantry may receive an addition from the gravity of its author. The English very seldom admit upon their stage that style of *humor*: it would not have a theatrical effect.

There is a degree of misanthropy in the pleasantry of the English; and a sociability in that of the French: the one should be read when alone; the other strikes most amidst a number of auditors. What the English have of gayety, conducts almost always to a philosophical or moral result; that of the French has often no aim but pleasure: the English shine most in portraying whimsical characters: because there are a great many amongst themselves. Society does away singularities, but a retired life preserves them all.

There is seldom any quickness of perception in minds that are constantly employed on some material object. What is really useful, is easy to comprehend. A country where equality prevails, is also less sensible to the faults of uniformity: the nation being at unity with itself, its writers naturally accustom themselves to address their works to the judgment and sentiments of all classes; in short, every free country is and ought to be serious.

When the government is founded upon force, it has no occasion to fear a national turn for pleasantry, but when the authority depends upon the general confidence, and when the public is the principal spring; the talent and gayety which discover the ridicule, and delight in criticism, become exceedingly dangerous to liberty and political equality. We have spoken of the misfortunes of the Athenians which resulted from their immoderate love of pleasantry; and France would have furnished another example to the support of the first, if the great events of the revolution had left the national character to its natural development,

## CHAPTER XV.

### OF THE IMAGINATION OF THE ENGLISH IN THEIR POETRY AND NOVELS.

The invention of incidents, and the faculty of feeling and painting nature, are talents which are absolutely distinct: the one belongs more particularly to the literature of the east, and the other to that of the north. I have, I think, developed the different causes: what remains to be examined, is the particular character of the poetic imagination of the English.

The English have not invented any new subjects of poetry, like Tasso and Ariosto; neither are there romances founded upon marvelous incidents and supernatural events, like the Arabian and Persian tales; they still preserve a few images indeed of the religion of the north, but not a brilliant and various mythology like that of the Greeks: their poets however, have an inexhaustible fund of those sentiments and ideas which arise from the spectacle of nature. Supernatural events are limited; and are at most but circumscribed combinations, not susceptible of the progression which belongs to moral truths of every description. When the poets *attach themselves to dress their philosophical ideas with the colors of the imagination*, they in some mea-

sure enter that path in which enlightened men are continually advancing, unless a stop is put to their career by ignorance and tyranny.

The English, separated from the continent, have had but little connection at any period with the history and manners of their neighbors: they have a character peculiar to themselves in every style; their poetry does not resemble that of the French, nor even that of the Germans; but they have not attained the inventive excellence, both in fable and poetical incident, which was the principal glory of the Greek and Italian literature.

The English are accurate observers of nature, and know how to paint it; but they have not a creative genius: their superiority consists in the talent of expressing in a lively manner what they see and what they feel; they have the art of uniting philosophical reflections with the feelings excited by the beauties of the country. The aspect of the earth and sky, at all hours of the day or night, awakens in our minds numberless different sensations; and those who give themselves up to ideas inspired by nature, will experience a series of the most pure and elevated impressions, always analogous to those deep reflections on morality and religion by which man is connected with futurity.

At the revival of letters, and at the commencement of English literature, many of the English poets swerved from the national character, to imitate the Italians. Waller and Cowley may be included amongst these: we may also add Donne, Chaucer, &c. The English, however, have been less successful in this style than any other people; they are very deficient in that graceful ease so essential to light writing; they also want that quickness and facility which are to be acquired by being habitually in the society of men whose only aim is pleasure.

Pope's works are peculiarly calculated for models of grace and eloquence; nevertheless there are a great many faults to be found in them, especially in the 'Rape of the Lock.' There is nothing in the world can be more tedious than Spenser's 'Fairy Queen.' The poem of 'Hudibras,' although spirited and witty, is filled with pleasantries which are lengthened out even to satiety. Gay's 'Fables' are witty but not natural. Nor can any of the fugitive pieces of the English be compared with the writings of Voltaire, Ariosto, or La Fontaine. But it is not enough to know the affecting language of the passions; it is surely unnecessary to set a great value upon the rest.

How sublime are the *meditations* of the English! how fruitful in those sentiments which are developed by solitude! What profound philosophy is found in the 'Essay on Man!' It is possible that the mind or the imagination can be raised to a higher degree of elevation than in the 'Paradise Lost?' It is not the poetic invention which is the merit of this piece; the subject is almost entirely taken from the book of Genesis. But the allegory which the author was introduced in many places, is censured by taste; and we may often perceive that the poet is restrained and directed by his submission to orthodoxy. But what rendered Milton one of the greatest poets in the world, was the imposing grandeur of his character—the poetry we so much admire, was inspired by the wish of rendering the images equal to the conception of the understanding. It was to make his intellectual ideas understood, that the poet had recourse to the most terrible pictures that can strike the imagination. Before he gave form to Satan, he conceived him immaterial: he represented to himself his moral nature; he then accorded it with that gigantic figure, and the horrors of the place he inhabited. With what an infinity of talent he transports you from this hell into paradise! with what art he conducts you through the delightful paths of youth, nature and innocence! It is not the happiness of animated enjoyments; it is tranquillity which he contrasts with

crime, and the opposition appears still the greater. The piety of Adam and Eve, the primitive difference of their characters and their destinies, are painted as philosophy and imagination ought to have characterized them.\*

Gray's 'Elegy in a country church-yard,' the 'Epistle upon Eaton College,' and Goldsmith's 'Deserted Village,' are filled with that noble melancholy which is the majesty of sensible philosophy. Where can we find more poetical enthusiasm than in Dryden's 'Ode to Music?' What passion in the letters of Eloise! Can there be a more charming picture of love in marriage, than that which terminates the first ode of Thomson upon Spring?

What deep awful meditations in Young's 'Night Thoughts'; where man is described as reflecting upon the progress and termination of his existence; deprived of that happy illusion which leads us to feel an interest in the day before us, as well as in a century to come; in the events of the present time, as well as in a speculation upon eternity! Young judges of human life as if he did not belong to it; his thoughts seem to have risen above himself, to search for an imperceptible spot in the immensity of the creation, where he might observe, himself unseen.

—————What is the world?—a grave:  
Where is the dust which has not been alive?

And again,

—————What is life?—a war,  
Eternal war with woe,

This gloomy imagination, though more apparent in Young, is nevertheless the general color of the English poetry. If we find a monotony in Ossian on account of his images, which have little variety of themselves, not being interspersed with reflections that can interest the mind; we cannot make the same complaint of the English poets; they never fatigue, by giving way to their philosophical sadness; it perfectly accords with the nature of our being, and even with its destiny. There is nothing can cause a more agreeable sensation, than to be able to read ourselves into the habitual course of our reflections: and if we were to recall the particular passages of any writings in any language, we shall find that they have almost all the same character of elevation and melancholy.

It may be asked, why the English, who are so happy in their government, and in their customs and manners, should have so much more melancholy in their disposition than the French? The reason is, that liberty and virtue, the greatest result of the human reason require meditation; and that meditation naturally conducts the mind to serious objects.

In France, persons distinguished either by their sense or their rank had, in general, a great deal of gayety: but the gayety of the first classes in society is not a sign of the happiness of the nation. In order that the political and philosophical state of a nation should answer the intentions of nature, the lot of the middling class should be the happiest; those men who are superior in style, should be entirely devoted, and sacrifice every selfish interest, to the general good of the human species.

Happy is the country where the authors are melancholy, the merchants satisfied, the rich gloomy, and where the middling class of people are contented!

The English language, although not so harmonious or pleasing to the ear as the language of the east, has nevertheless, by the energy of its sound, a very great

\*—————though both  
Not equal, as their sexes not equal:  
For contemplation he, and valor form'd;  
For softness she, and sweet attractive grace:  
He for God only, she for God in him.

advantage in poetry: every word that is strongly accented, has an effect upon the mind, because it seems to come from a lively impression. The French language excludes from poetry a number of words as being too simple, which are really noble in English, from the manner in which they are articulated. I shall offer one example, When Macbeth, at the moment he is going to seat himself at the festive table, sees the place that was destined for him filled by the shade of Banquo, whom he had just assassinated, he exclaims with terror, 'The table is full!' and all the spectators tremble. If these same words were to be repeated in French, '*La table est remplie*;' the greatest actor in the world could not make the audience forget their common acceptance:—the French pronunciation does not admit of that accent which enobles every word by giving it animation.

The English poets, however, often take an undue advantage of the facility of their language and the genius of their nation: they exaggerate their images, they refine their ideas, they exhaust what they express, and taste does not warn them when to stop. But *much will be forgiven them* on account of the sincerity of their emotions. We judge of the faults of their writings as those of nature, and not as those of art.

The English have a great pre-eminence in a style of writing which they call *novels*; these are entirely works of the imagination, without historical allusions, and without allegory; founded, in general, upon the characters and events of private life. Love has till now been the subject of this sort of writing; and the rank which women hold in England, is the principal cause of the inexhaustible fertility of these writings.

In no country whatever have the women enjoyed so much of that happiness which arises from domestic affection, as in England. We often find a great purity of manners in countries that are poor, and especially among the middling class of the people: but it belongs to the first class to set the example; it is they alone who can choose their way of life, the others are forced to resign themselves to the one which is imposed on them by destiny: and when the mind is brought to the exercise of virtue by unpleasant circumstances, or personal privations, it is never accompanied with all the idea and sentiment which spring from that virtue which is the effect of choice. It is then, in general, the manners of the first class of society which influence the literature; and when they are good, they are a preservation to love, and love is the inspirer of novels. Without stopping here to examine philosophically the destiny of women in the social order; it is certain that, in general, their domestic virtues alone obtain from the men all the tenderness of which their parts are capable.

But although the women in England may be beloved, they are very far from enjoying those pleasures of society which France formerly afforded to the fair sex. But it is not from a picture of the enjoyments of self-love that an interesting novel can be composed; although the history of life too often proves that many can be contented with such. The English manners furnish a great number of delicate shades and affecting situations for novels. One would be apt to imagine at first, that immorality, knowing no bounds, would give a wider scope for romantic invention; but, on the contrary, we perceive that unfortunate facility to be barren and unfruitful. Passions without opposition sacrifices without regret, and connections without delicacy, take from novels their every charm: the small number of this kind possessed by the French, had scarcely any success, even in the societies which had served them for models.

The English novels, like all their other writings, are spun out to a great length; but they are calculated for those who have adopted that style of life which



they represent; for those who lived retired in the country in the bosom of their families, for the leisure which they can spare from their regular occupations and domestic duties. If it were possible the French could support all that useless minuteness which is accumulated in those writings, it could only be from that curiosity which is inspired by the manners and customs of foreigners; they never tolerate any thing of that kind in their own works; in fact, those great lengths sometimes destroy the interest. But the English have a method of exciting interest by a series of just and moral observations upon the natural affections of life: attention is every thing with them, whether to describe what they see, or to discover what they seek.

'Tom Jones,' cannot be considered simply a novel; the abundance of philosophical ideas, the hypocrisy of society, and the contrast of natural qualities, are brought into action with an infinity of art; and love, as I have observed before,\* it is only a vehicle to introduce all these.

But Richardson stands first in rank; and after his writings are an infinity of novels, the most part of which are the productions of female pens: these give a perfect idea of this sort of writing which is so inexpressibly interesting.

The old French novels are filled with the adventures of chivalry, which do not in the least recall the events of life. Rousseau's 'Eloise' is an elegant and eloquent composition: but it only characterizes the genius of one man, and not the manners of a nation: all the other French novels that we admire, we owe to the imitation of the English; the subjects are not the same; but the manner of treating them, and their general character, belong exclusively to the English writers. They first ventured to imagine that the pictures of private affections were sufficient to interest the mind and the heart of man; that neither elevation of character, nor the importance of rank, nor the marvellous in events, were necessary to captivate the imagination: they thought that the power of love was sufficient to renovate incessantly both the picture and the situation without occasioning satiety. In short, it was the English who first composed works of morality under the form of novels, where an obscure though virtuous destiny might find motives of exaltation, and create for itself a sort of heroism.

There reigns throughout these writings a calm and proud sensibility, at once energetic and affecting: we can no where better feel the charm of that protecting love, which exempts the feeble being from watching over her own destiny, and concentrates all her esteem and affection in the tenderness of her defender!

## CHAPTER XVI.

### OF THE PHILOSOPHY AND ELOQUENCE OF THE ENGLISH.

The political situation of the English is distinguished by three particular epochs: namely, that preceding the revolution, the revolution itself, and the constitution which they have possessed since the year 1688: the character of their literature must necessarily have varied with circumstances. Prior to the revolution, we meet with but one philosopher, the great Chancellor Bacon: Theology entirely absorbed the years during which the revolution actually lasted: and poetry almost exclusively occupied the men of genius under the despotic and voluptuous reign of Charles II. It is only from the year 1688, since which time a steady constitution has given repose and liberty to England, that we can observe with any certitude the order of events.

\* Essay on Fictions

The writings of Bacon characterize his own genius, but not that of his country. He rushed alone into the field of sciences, sometimes obscure, sometimes scholastic: he nevertheless brought to light new ideas upon every subject, but never completed any thing. The man of genius may take a few steps in unknown paths, but it requires the united efforts of centuries, and of nations, to open the great road of science. The religious quarrels of the seventeenth century would have kept England in that state from which all Europe had been just emancipated, had not the knowledge which already existed in many countries, and even in England itself, risen in opposition to those vain disputes. Harrington, Sidney, and others, indifferent to theological questions, strenuously exerted themselves to re-unite men's minds to the principles of liberty; and their efforts were not entirely lost upon reason.

In short, at the end of the seventeenth century, the English philosophy assumed its real character; which it has sustained for a hundred years with increasing success.

The English philosophy is scientific; that is to say, the writers apply to moral ideas that kind of abstraction, those calculations and developments, which the learned make use of to arrive at discoveries, and to explain them.

The French philosophy belongs more to the *imagination* and to *sentiment*, but without being less profound; for these two faculties, when directed by reason, enlighten and assist the understanding to penetrate deeper into the knowledge of the human heart.

The Christian religion, such as it is professed in England, and the constitutional principles, such as they are established, give a great latitude to the researches of thought, either in morals or in politics: nevertheless, the English philosophers in general do not allow themselves to examine every thing; the *useful*, which is the main-spring of all their efforts, interdicts to a certain degree their independence. They have, it is true, developed in a superior manner the metaphysical theory of the faculties of man; but they have less knowledge of the character and the passions. Bruyere, the Cardinal De Retz, and Montaigne, have no equal among the English.

The English have treated politics as a science wholly intellectual. Hobbes, Fergusson, Locke, and others, searched, through different systems, to find out what was the primitive state of society, in order to arrive at the knowledge of what laws should be instituted for men. Smith, Hume, and Shaftesbury, studied sentiments and characters in a point of view almost entirely metaphysical; they wrote for instruction and meditation, but did not seem to think it necessary to captivate the interest, even while they solicited the attention. Montesquieu seems to give life to ideas, and, amidst the abstractions of the mind, recalls in each line the moral nature of man. The French writers, having always the tribunal of society present to their imagination, study to obtain the approbation of readers who are soon fatigued, by uniting the charms of sentiment to the analysis of ideas, and thus exhibit at one view a greater number of truths.

The English have made the same progress in the philosophical sciences, as they have in their commercial industry, by the aid of time and patience. The inclination of their philosophers for things in the abstract, might have drawn them into systems contrary to reason, had not the spirit of calculation regulated their application to abstract combinations; morality, the most experimental of all human ideas, commercial interest, and the love of liberty, always brought back the English philosophers to a practical result. How many works have they undertaken for the service of mankind, for the education of children, the relief of the unfortunate, the criminal legislation, the political economy, for the sciences, for morals, for metaphysics! what philosophy



in every conception! and what respect for experience in the choice of the means!

And all this emulation and wisdom was owing to the enjoyment of liberty. But in France, the writers could so seldom flatter themselves with influencing the institutions of their country by their writings, that even in the most serious discussions, they only thought of showing a superiority of understanding. In consequence of which, systems that would have been right in some respects, were carried even to paradoxes; and reason not being able to produce any useful effect, they wished at least that their paradox should be brilliant. Besides, under an absolute monarchy, they might have spoken in praise of *pure* democracy, like Rousseau in his Social Contract; but no one would have dared to have sported ideas nearer the reality. All was wit and conceit in France, *except* the decrees of the king's council; while, in England, every one might say as he thought proper with regard to the resolutions of their representatives; and by this habit of comparing thoughts with actions, they accustom themselves to the love of public good, and to the hopes of being able to contribute towards it.

This principle of usefulness, if I may so express myself, which gave so much energy to the English literature, was nevertheless an hindrance to their arriving at that conciseness of style justly esteemed one of the greatest perfections of the art which the French have attained. Most of the English works are confused through prolixity. The patriotism which reigns in England, inspires a kind of family-interest for all questions of *general utility*. An Englishman feels himself as much interested in them, as in his own private affairs, and will be as long entertained in discussing them; but the authors, confiding in this disposition, often abuse the liberty which it gives. The English analyze all their ideas with as much minuteness as a tutor makes use of when addressing his pupils. This may possibly be the better means of disseminating knowledge among the people in general: but the philosophical method cannot in this way attain the summit of its perfection.

The French would compose a better work than the English; they would present the same ideas with more order and precision; and as they suppress much of the intermediate matter, their works require more attention in order to be understood; but the classification of ideas gains as much, whether from the rapidity with which they are expressed, or from the direct way through which the mind is led on. In England, fame is at first almost always acquired from the suffrages of the multitude: which afterwards they obtain from the superior classes. In France it always began with the superior classes; and from them descended to the multitude. I shall not examine which is preferable for the happiness of a nation; but I am certain that the art of writing, and the method of composing, cannot arrive to that perfection in England that it ought to have done in France, when authors looked almost exclusively to the first ranks of their country for approbation.

In England, authors either devote themselves to abstract systems, or researches which have some positive and practical utility in view; but this intermediate style, which unites reflection and eloquence, instruction and interest, fanciful expressions and just ideas, is scarcely known by the English: their productions have only a single aim, to be either useful or agreeable.

The English are great writers in verse, and carry eloquence of mind to the highest degree; but their works in prose scarcely partake of that life and energy which are found in their poetry. Blank-verse presenting very little difficulty, the English reserve for their poetry all that belongs to the imagination; they consider prose, but as the language of logic: the only object of their style is to make their arguments understood, and not to create an interest by their expressions. The English language has not yet acquired that degree

of perfection of which it is susceptible. As it has more often been employed in commercial affairs than in literature, it has never been displayed in all its shades of variety: and in any language much more correctness and refinement are required to write well in prose, than to write good verse.

Some English authors, however, such as Bolingbroke, Shaftesbury, and Addison, are reputed as good writers in prose: nevertheless, their images are deficient in energy, and their style in originality. The character of the writer is not imprinted in his style, nor his internal emotions felt by his readers. It seems as if the English feared to give too much scope to their fancy, except in their poetic inspiration: when they write in prose, a sort of *modesty* or *bashfulness* seems to keep their sentiments in captivity.

The English transport themselves into the ideal world of poetry; but we seldom or ever find any animation in their writing upon existing subjects. The French authors are justly reproached with their egotism, their vanity, and the importance which each one attaches to his own person, in a country where the *public* interest holds no place. But it is nevertheless certain that an author, in order to acquire eloquence, must express his own sentiments: it is not his interest but his emotion, it is not his self-love but his character, that must animate his writings.

In England, the spirit of business is applied to the principles of literature, and all appeal to the feelings and every thing that can in the least influence the judgment is interdicted in those works of reason. Mr Burke, the most violent enemy of France, has, in his work against that country, some resemblance to the eloquence of the French; and although he had many admirers in England, there are some who are tempted to accuse his *style* of bombast, as much as his *opinions*, and to find his manner of writing incompatible with justice.

The Letters of Junius are the most eloquent productions in the English prose: perhaps too, the principal cause of the great pleasure attached to this work, is the admiration which is felt for the liberty of a country, where the ministry, and even the king himself, might be thus attacked without disturbing in the least the public tranquillity or the organization of society, or yielding to the depositaries of public power the right to withdraw themselves under the most vehement expressions of individual censure.

The parliamentary debates are more animated than the style of any English author in prose: the necessity of the extempore, the subject of the debates, the opposition, the retort, and, in short, every thing appertaining to them excites an interest and causes an agitation that may hurry away the orators: nevertheless, argument is always the principal character of parliamentary discourse. But the popular eloquence of the ancients, and that of the first French orators, would produce in the House of Commons more astonishment than conviction. We will now take a cursory view of the causes of these differences.

The English revolution, which was occasioned by theological disputes, must have set every popular passion into motion. Eloquence, therefore, at this period, instead of receiving any great impulse, naturally took the form of argumentation agreeably to the nature of the subjects it treated on. The commercial and financial intererests were the first objects of all the English Parliaments; and every time that they were called upon to discourse with men upon the calculation of their interest, it was by argument alone that they obtained their confidence. The diplomatical situation of Europe was another subject of parliamentary debate, which required the greatest circumspection from its importance. The two parties which divided the parliament, did not contest, like the plebeians and patricians, with all the passions of men; there was gener-

ally some rivalry of individuals combined with the ambition that excited them. They were debaters in which the opposition, wishing to give to the king a minister of its own party, always, even in their warmest disputes, kept up the respect that was necessary to obtain the aim which they had in view. The point of honor also prescribed bounds to the violence of personal attacks. In short, the moderns have in general a respect for the laws, which must also in some measure change the character of their eloquence. Although there were laws enacted in the time of the ancients, popular authority had often both the will and the power to destroy and create them anew at their pleasure : while the moderns were generally constrained to comment upon the laws actually existing. Without pretending to deny the advantage of this constraint, it nevertheless follows that the spirit of discussion and analysis are of less weight in our present assemblies, than the talent of persuasion.

The logic of the orator, in the room of wrestling with men, like Demosthenes, should attack them with more suitable arms, the effect of which would be more indirect. A representative government necessarily draws into a narrow compass the objects which are discussed, and the number of those who are addressed ; the eloquence of Demosthenes would bear no proportion with the auditory and the topic under discussion. The witnesses *known and counted*, by which the English orators\* are surrounded ; the table upon which they uniformly mark the repetition of the same arguments ; every thing, in short, must remind them of a council of state rather than a popular assembly ; and they must feel themselves engaged to make use of no other weapons than those of cool firmness, *argument*, or irony.

Many of the causes which I have mentioned, may be equally applied to the representative government of France ; but the first epochs of the revolution offered subjects of antiquity for the discussion of its orators. Mirabeau, and some others after him, used a style of eloquence more attractive than that of the English : the habits of business are there less perceptible, and the successes of the mind much more so. Long developments will ever be less tolerated in France than in England.

The English orators, like Cicero, often repeat the same ideas, and frequently recur to the same eloquence which has been before employed with success : but the French are so jealous of the admiration they express, that if the orator wished to obtain applause twice upon the same sentiment, or the same happiness of expression, the auditors would reproach him with a consequential confidence, and would not only refuse a second acknowledgment of his talent, but would almost believe that they had not given it him at first.

This disposition in the French must elevate real talents to the highest degree ; but it draws mediocrity into the most ridiculous and gigantic efforts : it also but too often favors, in a lamentable degree, the success of the most absurd assertions. If an argument is prolonged, its errors will be more easily discovered : if it could be refuted by those forms under which elementary truths are developed, the most common capacity would at least understand the object of the question. The English dialect is much less proper than that of the French for the success of sophisms ; the declamatory style, which is so favorable to erroneous ideas, is seldom admitted by the English, the language of prose having arrived at a much higher degree of perfection in France than in England ; the French orators who are truly eloquent, have a greater command over the hu-

\* The orator of the opposition party, not being engaged in the direction of affairs, is generally more eloquent than the minister ; but at this present time, in England, it would be hard to decide between two men of such prodigious talents ; nevertheless the inclination more naturally inclines towards the one who is more of power.

man passions, and have the art of uniting a greater variety of talents in the same discourse. The English consider the art of speaking in the same point of view as they consider every other talent, *that of usefulness* ; and this is what must occur in every nation after a certain time of repose founded upon liberty.

But the repose founded upon despotism produces a contrary effect ; it leaves in existence the active principles of individual self-love, and renders the mind indifferent to nothing but the national interest : while the political importance of each citizen in a free country is such, that he holds in greater estimation his share of the public happiness than any personal advantages that would not serve to the benefit of the whole.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### OF GERMAN LITERATURE.

The present century, 1800, gave birth to German literature : prior to that period, the Germans had directed their attention very successfully to the sciences and to metaphysics ; but their writings, which were more frequently in the Latin than in their native language, exhibited universally a want of originality of character. The same causes that have already conspired to retard the progress of German literature, still oppose themselves in some instances to its perfection.\* And it is, moreover, an evident disadvantage to the literature of any nation to be formed at a later period than that of the surrounding countries ; as, in such a case, imitative talents too often usurp the place of national genius. Before we proceed further, it may not be improper to consider what are the principal causes that have modified the spirit of literature in Germany, what the peculiar character borne by the works of intrinsic merit it has produced, and to suggest those inconveniences against which its authors ought to be guarded.

The division of the country into petty states, to the exclusion, as it were, of a single capital, in which the resources of the whole nation might concentrate ; where all possessed of distinguished talents might be attracted to assemble ;—must undoubtedly render it more difficult to acquire and form a discriminating taste in Germany than in France. In a number of small spheres, emulation multiplies its endeavors ; but neither judgment nor criticism are exacted with severity, when every town can boast of possessing men of talents. It must also be difficult to find a standard for the language, when there are divers universities, and divers academies, equally authorized to decide in literary controversies : for in this case, many writers believe themselves privileged incessantly to coin new words ; and confusion must necessarily ensue from such an abundance.

It is, I believe, generally acknowledged that federation is a political system very favorable to happiness and liberty ; but it is almost always prejudicial to the greatest possible display of arts and talents ; to promote which, taste must have attained perfection. The ha-

\* I must here call to remembrance the purport of this work ; by no means do I pretend to write an analysis of all the celebrated productions comprehended in the term Literature ; I have only endeavored to characterize the general principle of its respective stages, in their relation to, and influence over laws, manners, and religion. It will be naturally supposed, that I could not treat on such a subject without quoting many writers, and many publications ; but this I have done merely in support of my own arguments, without any intention of judging and discussing the merits of each author ; a task that could not be performed without the aid of an universal library. This observation applies more especially to the present chapter than to any other. Germany abounds with excellent productions which I have passed over in silence, those already mentioned being almost sufficient to demonstrate the truth of the assertions I have advanced respecting the general character of German literature.

bitual association of learned men, their union in one common centre, establishes a kind of literary legislature, well calculated to direct others to the most advantageous course of study.

The federal government to which Germany is subjected, deprives that country of the full enjoyment of all the political advantages attached to the federate system : nevertheless the German literature bears that distinguished character which stamps it as the literature of a free people ; and the reason of this is evident. The learned there maintain a republic amongst themselves ; and in proportion to the abuses introduced by the despotism of rank, they detach themselves from society and from public affairs. They consider all ideas in their natural relations ; the institutions existing amongst them are too much in opposition to the simple notions of philosophy, to induce a compliance with them at the expense of their reason.

The English are less independent than the Germans in their general manner of considering whatever relates to religious or political opinions ; they find repose and liberty in the order of things adopted by them, and consent to the modification of some philosophical principles. They respect their own happiness, and dispense with certain prejudices, as a man married to a woman whom he loves, would strenuously maintain the indissolubility of marriage. The philosophers of Germany, encompassed with faulty and imperfect institutions, devoid equally of reason and advantages, devote themselves entirely to a strict search into natural truths. A divided government, without giving political liberty, almost necessarily establishes the liberty of the press.

There can be no prevailing religion, nor prevailing opinion, in a country thus disunited ; established powers are supported by the protection of higher powers ; but the empire of each respective state over its subjects is extremely limited by opinion : every thing may become a subject of debate, although the possibility of taking active measures may be precluded.

Society also possessing fewer attractions in Germany than in England, its philosophers generally live in solitude ; and the interest so warmly excited amongst the English respecting public affairs, is little, if at all, felt by the Germans. Their princes certainly treat men of letters with distinction, and frequently grant them tokens of honor : nevertheless the governments, in general, appoint only their ancient nobles to political departments ; and it is moreover a fact, that none but representative governments can possibly inspire all classes of people with a direct interest in public affairs. The minds, therefore, of literary men ought to be directed to the contemplation of nature, and to a knowledge of themselves.

The Germans excel in delineating the tender passions of the mind, and in portraying the sombre scenes of melancholy. In this respect they bear a closer resemblance to the style of Ossian than any other northern writers ; but their meditative habits of life inspire them with an enthusiasm for the sublime, and an indignation against the abuses of social order, which protects them from that *ennui* so sensibly felt by the English amongst all the vicissitudes of their career. Enlightened men, in Germany, live only to study ; and their minds are self-supported by a kind of internal activity more uniform and more lively than that of the English.

The Germans delight most in the indulgence of their ideas. There is nothing sufficiently great and free in their governments to induce the philosophers to prefer the enjoyments of power to those of reflection ; and the ardor of their mind is not damped by a too constant intercourse with mankind.

The German productions are less practically useful than those of the English : they indulge themselves *more in systematic combinations ; because, having no influence whatever over the institutions of their country by their writings, they abandon themselves, without*

any object in view, to the sport of their imaginations : and they adopt successively each sect of mystical religion, and beguile, in numberless ways, that time and life which they can only dedicate to meditation. But there is no country whose authors have more successfully dived into the sentiments of impassioned man, the sorrows of the heart, and the philosophical resources which are best calculated to support them. The general character of literature is the same in all the northern countries ; but the distinguishing characteristics of that of the Germans spring from the political and religious situation of the country.

One of the most excellent works of the German writers, and which they may justly hold up in opposition to the master-pieces of other languages, is 'Werter.' As it is called a romance, many are ignorant that it is a work of higher consideration : and indeed, I am not acquainted with any production that displays a more striking and natural picture of the wanderings of enthusiasm ; a deeper insight into misfortune ; in a word, a search into that abyss of nature, where truth displays itself at once to the eye that is capable of discerning it.

The character of 'Werter' cannot be a common one : it discovers, in all their force, the injuries that may accrue to an energetic mind from a bad social order ; instances of which are more frequent in Germany than in any other part of the world.

Some have blamed the author of 'Werter' for involving his hero in any other distress than that arising from love ; for suffering the world to see that he felt his humiliation ; and that he harbored a deep resentment against that pride of rank which caused it. This is however, in my opinion, one of the first traits in the work. Goethe wished to depict a being, suffering through all the various affections of a mind exquisitely sensible and proud : he wished to describe that complicated agony which alone can conduct the human mind to the deepest gulf of despair. Natural evils may still leave us some resource ; society must contribute to infuse its poison into the wound, before our reason can be totally subverted, and death become the object of our wishes.

What a sublime union do we find, in 'Werter,' of thought and of sentiment, of the blind impetuosity of passion, and the sober reasonings of philosophy ! Rousseau and Goethe alone knew how to paint reflecting passion ; passion which judges yet knows that it cannot subdue itself. This search into his own feelings, made even while he is their victim, would have weakened the interest of the work, if described by any but a man of genius. As it is ; nothing can be more affecting than this combination of agony and meditation, reasoning and insanity, which portray a miserable man contemplating and reflecting upon his situation, yet sinking under affliction ; directing his imagination towards himself, courageously viewing his own sufferings, yet incapable of affording himself consolation or relief.

It has been said, that 'Werter' is a dangerous work ; that it exalts the sentiments, instead of directing them ; and that some instances of fanaticism which it has excited, are proofs of this assertion. The enthusiasm which it has awakened, particularly in Germany, proceeds from its being written entirely in the national taste. It is not Goethe who has created it, he has only painted it from the life.

Enthusiasm is universally prevalent in Germany ; and 'Werter' is favorable to dispositions of that cast. The example of suicide never can become contagious ; moreover, it is not the mere incident invented in a romance, but the sentiments conveyed through such a medium, that leave a deep impression : and that melody of the soul which derives its source from too exalted a mind, and eventually renders life hateful ; that melody of the soul, I repeat, is perfectly described in 'Werter.'

Every man possessed of sensibility and generosity, has at some period or other felt himself infected by it ;

and frequently, perhaps, some excellent beings may have questioned themselves, whether life, under its present circumstances, could be supported by the virtuous, if the entire organization of society had not its weight with candid and affectionate dispositions, and did not render existence totally impossible.

The perusal of 'Werter' teaches that the most exalted sentiments, even of honor itself, may lead to insanity; it shows us at what degree sensibility becomes too highly wrought to allow the mind to support even the most natural occurrences. We are warned from our wrong propensities by every reflection, every circumstance, and every moral treatise: but when we know our disposition inclined to candor and sensibility, we trust ourselves implicitly to its guidance, and may be led to the lowest depth of misery without feeling or perceiving the succession of errors that have insensibly conducted us thither.

To characters of this description, the example of 'Werter's' fate is useful; it is a work that makes virtue itself acknowledge the necessity of reason.

Goethe has written many other works of high respect in Germany. Wilhelm Meister's Hermann and Dorothea, &c., the Odes of Klopstock, the Tragedies of Schiller, the writings of Wieland, the dramatic productions of Kotzebue, &c., would require many chapters, if we wished to examine their literary merit; but this task, as I have before observed, cannot enter into the general plan of my work.

The 'Messiah' of Klopstock, notwithstanding innumerable defects, prolixities, mysteries, and inexplicable obscurities, displays beauties of the first magnitude. The character of Abaddon, undergoing the fate of the guilty, while persevering in the love of virtue, uniting the faculties of an angel with the sufferings inflicted in the infernal regions, is an idea altogether new. Such conspicuous truth in the expressions of love, and the pictures of nature, amongst the most whimsical inventions of every kind, produces a very singular effect.

The consternation that would be occasioned by the idea of death, when thought of for the first time, is described with an affecting energy in one of the cantos of the 'Messiah.' An inhabitant of a planet where life is interminable, interrogates an angel who brings him intelligence from our globe on the nature of death. 'What!' he exclaims, 'can it be true that you are acquainted with a country where the son may be for ever separated from her who has lavished upon him the most tender marks of affection during the early years of his life!—where the mother may see herself deprived of the child on whom she had reposed all her hopes of future happiness!—a country too where love is known; where two beings devoted to each other, live perhaps long together, then learn to exist alone! Can it be in that country possible to wish for life, where it serves only to form connections which death must dissolve; only to love what must be lost; only to cherish in the heart an image, whose object may disappear from the world where it leaves its wretched survivor!' When we first begin to read the 'Messiah,' we appear to enter into a gloom in which we are frequently bewildered; where sometimes, indeed, beautiful objects are distinguishable, but a uniform melancholy reigns throughout the whole; which however is not entirely devoid of sweetness.

The German tragedies, and particularly those of Schiller, contain beauties which always indicate a great mind. In France, a delicacy of mind, a feeling for the reigning customs, and a fear of ridicule, weaken, in some respects, the vivacity of impressions. Accustomed to watch over ourselves, we necessarily lose, in the midst of society, those impetuous emotions which develop to every eye the predominant affections of the soul. But in reading those German tragedies which have acquired celebrity, words, expressions, and ideas, may be often found, that awaken in ourselves some

sentiments which the regular institutions and ties of society have stifled or restrained. These expressions re-animate and transport us; persuade us in a moment that we are about to be lifted above all factitious considerations, above all compulsory forms; and that after a long restraint, the first friend we shall find is our own original character,—is, in fact, ourselves.

The Germans are highly distinguished as painters of nature. Gessner, Zacharias, many poets in the pastoral line, excite a love of country, and appear to be inspired with its sweet impressions. They describe it in such a manner, as must strike the attentive observer, when the toils of agriculture and the labors of the field, which claim the presence of man and the enjoyments of tranquil life, are in unison with the disposition of the soul.

We must indeed be in this peaceful temper, in order to relish such descriptions. When we are agitated by the passions, the exterior calm of nature adds to our sufferings. Prospects that are wild and gloomy, and every melancholy external object that surrounds us, aid us in the enduring of internal anguish.

The tragedy of Goetz de Berlichingen, as well as some other popular romances, are filled with those mementos of chivalry, which leave so strong an impression on the imagination, and which the Germans are so competent to introduce under varied and interesting forms.

After this cursory survey of the principal beauties of the German literature, I feel it incumbent upon me to direct the reader's attention towards the defects of its writers, as well as to the consequences that might result from those errors, if they were suffered to remain without correction.

The lofty style is, of all others, that in which we may be the most easily deceived. Great talents are necessary, to avoid departing from truth when we endeavor to paint a character raised above habitual prejudices; and in depicting enthusiasm, inferiority is insupportable. 'Werter' has given rise to a greater number of bad imitations than any other literary *chef-d'œuvre*: the aiming at an elevated style in a work of this kind, is the most ridiculous thing in the world. Wieland has shown with great success, in his 'Peregrinus Proteus,' the absurdities of that factitious enthusiasm so widely different from the genuine inspiration of genius. The Germans are much more indulgent in this respect than ourselves; they permit also, and often even applaud, an abundance of trivial notions in philosophy, concerning riches, beneficence, birth, merit, &c.; common-place subjects, which in France would at once repress and damp every kind of interest. The Germans also hear with pleasure the repetition of the most hackneyed thoughts, although their genius daily leads to the discovery of those which are genuine.

The language of the Germans is not yet determined; each author has his own peculiar style; and thousands in that country look upon themselves as authors. How can literature be established in a country where nearly three thousand volumes are published annually! It is a very easy matter to write the German language sufficiently well to be printed; too many obscurities are permitted, too much latitude allowed, common-place ideas are too frequently received, and too great a number of words united together or newly coined; whereas a difficulty of style must naturally discourage men of modern abilities. Genuine talent is at a loss to discover itself amidst such a numberless multitude of books; and though at length it may certainly be distinguishable, yet the general taste is more and more corrupted by insipidities, and literary pursuits must in course terminate in losing their respectability.

The Germans are sometimes deficient in taste, in writings which are the productions of their natural imagination: they fail of it still more frequently in works of imitation. Amongst their writers, those who are at

possessed of an original genius, borrow sometimes the defects of English literature, and occasionally those of the French.

I have endeavored already to make it appear by analyzing Shakspeare, that his beauties can only be equalled by a genius similar to his own ; and that his defects ought to be carefully avoided.

The Germans resemble the English in some respects : for this reason, they lose themselves less frequently in studying the English authors than the French : nevertheless they have also adopted the system of contrasting the vulgar with the heroic character : by which means they diminish the beauty of numbers of their best productions.

To this defect, which they possess in common with the English, is superadded a taste for metaphysical sentiments ; which frequently serves to weaken the effect of the most affecting situations. As they are by nature given to thought and meditation, they insert the abstract ideas, the explanations and definitions, with which their heads are filled, in the most impassioned scenes ; and their heroes, their women, the ancients, and the moderns, are all made to speak in the language of a German philosopher. This is a glaring defect, against which their writers ought to be guarded. Their genius frequently inspires them with the most simple expressions for the noblest passions ; but when they lose themselves in obscurity, we are no longer interested, and our reason forbids our approbation.

The German writers have been frequently reproached for their want of grace and sprightliness. Some of them, apprehensive of a censure upon which the English pride themselves endeavor to imitate the French style ; by which means they fall into worse errors : because, having once stepped out of their native character, they no longer possess those energetic and striking beauties which occasion their defects to be glossed over and forgotten. Those charms of grace and sprightliness which characterized some of the French writers before the revolution, could have birth only from the circumstances peculiar to ancient France ; and, even in that nation, could be produced only at Paris. There are numbers also amongst us, who have failed in their literary attempts, although surrounded by the best models. The Germans are by no means to be depended upon for making the best choice of authors for their imitation.

In Germany, perhaps, it may be thought that Crebillon and Dorat are writers remarkable for grace : they therefore overcharge the copy of a style already so inflated as to be almost insupportable to the French.

The German writers, who within their own minds might find all that could interest men of every country, by bleeding the mythology of the Greeks and the gallantry of the French, produce a medley from which they seem anxious to banish both nature and truth.

In France, the power of ridicule always terminates by leading us back to the paths of simplicity : but in a country like Germany, where the tribunal of society has so little influence, and is so little in unison in itself, nothing ought to be risked in a style which requires the most constant practice and the finest feeling of all the powers of the mind. They ought to confine themselves to the universal principles of the higher walks of literature, and write on those subjects in which nature and reason are competent guides.

The Germans have sometimes the fault of introducing into their philosophical works a sort of pleasantry, which is by no means adapted to serious writings. They think by this measure to accommodate themselves to their readers.\* But we ought never to imagine that

\* A German mythologist, descending in one of his tracts upon a stone which he had not been able to discover, expresses him-

self thus upon the subject : " This fugitive nymph escapes our search ; and exaggerating afterwards the properties of another stone, he exclaims, ' Ah, syron ! ' "

It is sometimes also through a mistaken wish to please the fair sex, that the Germans endeavor to blend the serious and the frivolous. The English never study the taste of females in their writings : the French, by the rank they have granted to them in society, have rendered them excellent judges of genius and taste. The Germans ought to entertain an affection for them, as their ancestors did formerly ; who attributed to them some qualities attached to divinity. They ought to pay them the tribute of respect without descending too much in their correspondences with them.

In a word, in order to render philosophical truths admissible in a country where they are not yet publicly adopted, it has been thought necessary to dress them in the garb of tales, dialogues or fables : and Wieland especially has acquired great reputation in this style of writing. On some occasions, indeed, some artifice or disguise may perhaps be necessary in order to introduce truth. What they wished to communicate to the moderns, they might perhaps be obliged to put into the mouth of the ancients ; and thus recalling the past, make it serve as an allegory for the use of the present times. We cannot judge how far the contrivances used by Wieland are politically requisite : but here\* it may be repeated, that, with relation to literary merit, it is an error to believe that philosophical truths become more interesting by a medley of personages and incidents which serve merely as a pretext for want of arguments.

The analysis loses its solidity, and the romance its interest, by their being blended. To render fictitious incidents at all captivating, they ought to succeed each other with dramatic rapidity : to render arguments convincing, they must be duly connected, and conclusive. When the interest is abridged by discussion, and discussion by the interest, far from giving a respite to discriminating minds, their attention becomes wearied : less execution is required to follow the thread of an idea as far as reflection can carry it, than incessantly to resume and to quit arguments of which the chain is broken, and impressions that are weakened by interruption.

The success of Voltaire has inspired some with a wish to follow his example in writing philosophical tales : but that animating gayety, that varied grace, which characterizes Voltaire in this kind of composition, defies imitation. There is, without doubt a philosophical inference to be found at the conclusion of his tales ; but the pleasantry and the turn that he gives to his compositions is such, that his aim is not to be perceived till the catastrophe : like an excellent comedy, the moral of which we feel upon reflection, but at its first representation on the stage we are only struck with its interest and action.

Serious reason and eloquent sensibility are the allowed province of the German literature ; its attempts in any other line have always been less successful. There is no nation more peculiarly adapted to philosophical studies. Their historians, amongst whom we must first rank Schiller and Muller, are as distinguished as it is possible to be in writing modern history. A feudal government is extremely prejudicial to the interest excited by incident and character. In that war-like age, our imagination is apt to fancy all great men clad in the same armor, and that their characters bear self thus upon the subject : " This fugitive nymph escapes our search ; and exaggerating afterwards the properties of another stone, he exclaims, ' Ah, syron ! ' "

\* See the Essay on Fictions.

as close a resemblance to each other, as their helmets and their shields.

How much honor do the Germans reflect upon their nation by their persevering labors, by their researches into metaphysics, and into every other science! They have not a political country; but they have rendered it a literary and a philosophical country, and are animated with the most noble enthusiasm for its glory.

Nevertheless, a voluntary subjection prevents the Germans from being, in some respects, so enlightened a people as they might otherwise become: this subjection is the spirit of sect, which in a life of indolence, supplies the place of a spirit of party, and partakes of some of its inconveniences. Undoubtedly, before the number of followers of any sect is increased, individuals apply all their attention to judge of it, and decide in its favor, or otherwise, by the uncontrolled exercise of their reason. The first choice is free, but not so its consequences. As soon as a person is satisfied with its basis, he adopts, in order to maintain the sect, all the conclusions which the master may deduce from his own principles. A sect, however philosophical it may be in its aim, is never so in its means to attain that end. A blind confidence must always be inspired, to compensate for individual decision: for numbers, whilst their reason is uncontrolled, never give an assent to all the opinions of one man alone.

There is yet another important observation that may be made against the new systems of which it is attempted to compose a sect; the progress of the human mind is too gradual to admit of any succession of just ideas. A century discovers two or three additional ideas; and that century is therefore esteemed illustrious. How then can an individual conceive a chain of thoughts entirely new! Moreover, all truths are susceptible of evidence, and evidence makes no sect. Caprice, and mystery above all, are required to excite in men that which gives rise to spirits of sect, an ardent wish to distinguish themselves. This wish becomes really useful to the progress of the understanding, when it excites emulation in every species of talents; but not when it subjects many minds to dependence upon one only.

In order to conquer empires, disciplined armies must acknowledge the authority of a commander-in-chief: but in order to make a progress in the career of truth, each man must proceed by himself, guided by the light of the age he lives in, and not by the documents of any party.\*

The enlightened amongst the Germans have generally a love of virtue and of the *beautiful* in all things; a circumstance which gives great character to their writings. The distinguishing feature of their philosophy is, that they have substituted the austerity of morality in lieu of religious superstition. In France, they have been contented to overthrow the empire of opinion. But of what utility would knowledge be to the happiness of nations, if that knowledge was only the harbinger of destruction;—if it never opened to the mind any principle of life;—if it did not inspire the soul with new sentiments and new virtues, for the support of former duties?

The Germans are eminently calculated to be free, since already, in their philosophical revolution, they have substituted in the place of the worn-out barriers of antiquity, the immutable bounds of natural reason.

If, by any invincible misfortune, France should ever be destined to lose all hope of liberty, Germany would become the central seat of learning: and in its bosom would be established, at some future epoch, the principles of political philosophy. Our wars with the English must have rendered them inimical to every thing that recalls France to their memory: but a more

equitable impartiality would guide the opinions of the Germans.

They are more perfect than we are in the art of softening the lot of mankind; they enlighten the understanding, and lead the way to conviction; while we by force attempt every thing, undertake every thing, and in every thing have failed. We lay a foundation only for animosities; and the friends of liberty appear in the midst of the nation, with down-cast looks, blushing for the crimes of some, and calumniated by the prejudices of others.

Ye enlightened people! ye inhabitants of Germany! who perhaps will one day be, like us, enthusiasts in every republican idea; be invariably faithful to one determined principle, which is of itself a sufficient protection from all irreparable errors. Never indulge yourselves in an action which morality can disapprove; attend not to the pitiful arguments that may be holden out to you upon the difference that ought to be established between the morality of public and of private characters. This distinction proceeds from a perverted understanding, and a narrow mind; and if we should perish, it will be because we have adopted it.

Behold the effect of crimes in the interior of a nation:—the persecuting always agitated, the persecuted always implacable;—no opinion can appear innocent, and no argument can be heard;—a multitude of facts, calumnies, and falsehoods so accumulated on the heads of all, that amidst the whole body of people, there scarcely remains one upright consideration, one man to whom another man will vouchsafe the slightest mark of condescension, nor any one party faithful to the same principles: some individuals we see united by the tie of general consternation, a tie easily broken by the hope of self-preservation: in fine, so terrible a confusion between liberal opinions and culpable actions, between servile opinions and liberal sentiments, that esteem becomes unsettled, and knows not whereon to fix, and conscience hardly dares to confide in itself for its own security.

One single day, in the course of which we may, in thought or word, have countenanced and supported measures that have led to cruelty and suffering,—that one day may of itself suffice to embitter life, and fundamentally to destroy that internal calm, that universal benevolence of heart, which gave birth to hope of our finding friends wherever we found men. Oh! let nations still virtuous, let men gifted with political abilities, who are yet irreproachable, assiduously preserve such blessings! and if a revolution should commence amongst them, let them fear amidst themselves only those perfidious friends who advise them to persecute the vanquished.

Liberty supplies strength for its own defence; the concurrence of interest opens all the needful resources; the impulse of ages overthrows all that would struggle for the past against the future: but inhumanity sows discord, perpetuates war, divides a whole nation into inimical bands; and that offspring of the serpent of Cadmus, to whom an avenging god granted life only to condemn them to wage war till death,—that offspring of the serpent is the people amongst whom injustice has long reigned.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

WHY ARE THE FRENCH POSSESSED OF MORE GRACE, TASTE, AND GAYETY, THAN ANY OTHER EUROPEAN NATION!

French gayety and French taste, have been proverbial in all the countries of Europe, and that taste and gayety have generally been attributed to the national

\* All Kant's ingenuity of mind and elevation of principle are not, I think, sufficient objections against what I have just advanced respecting the spirit of sect.

acter: but what is a national character, if not the result of institutions and circumstances which influence the happiness, interests, and customs of a people? Since those circumstances and those institutions have been changed, and even in the most tranquil periods of the revolution, the most striking contrasts have not been the subject of one single epigram, or of one spirited pleasantry. Many of those men who have obtained great ascendancy over the destiny of France, were destitute of every grace of expression and brilliancy of understanding; perhaps even they were indebted for some part of their influence to the gloom, silence, and chilling ferocity, that pervaded both their manners and their sentiments.

Religion and laws determine almost entirely the resemblance, or the difference of the genius of nations. The climate too may occasion some changes; but the general education of the higher ranks of society is always the result of the prevailing political institutions. The seat of government being the centre of the chief interests of the people, their customs and opinions follow the lead of their interests. Let us examine what advantages arose from the ambition prevalent in France, to be distinguished by the attractions of grace and gaiety; that we may learn why this country offered such perfect models of both.

To please or displease, was the real source of those punishments and rewards which were not inflicted by the laws. Other countries had monarchical governments, kings absolute in authority, and magnificent courts; but no where could be found united the same circumstances which influenced the genius and the manners of the French.

Under limited monarchies, as in England and in Sweden, the love of liberty, the exercise of political rights, and the almost continual civil commotions, are a lesson to their kings, that it behooved them to choose such favorites as were possessed of certain defensive qualities; and also teach the courtiers, that, in order to obtain preferences with their respective kings, they must be able to support their authority by means that are independent and personal.

In Germany, long wars and the federation of its states prolonged the feudal spirit, and presented no common centre where all enlightened talents and general interests could unite.

The despots of the east and of the north were too much under the necessity of inspiring fear, to awaken in any degree the genius of their subjects; and the desire of pleasing their rulers was productive of a kind of familiarity with them, which merely tended to aggravate their tyranny.

In republics, however constituted they may be, it is so necessary for men to defend themselves, or to become subservient to each other, that neither harmony nor pleasure can be found amongst them.

The gallantry of the Moors, and the consequence which it gave to their women, would in some respects have raised the genius of the Spaniards nearly to a par with that of the French; but the superstitions to which they are devoted, have totally impeded their progress in any thing amiable or solid; and the indolence of the east has relinquished every exertion of talent to the dilgence of the priesthood.

France, then, was the only country where the authority of the king being consolidated by the tacit consent of the nobility, the monarch possessed an absolute power; the right of which, notwithstanding, was in fact undetermined: this situation compelled him to study even his courtiers, as constituting a part of that body of victors which granted and secured to him France, their conquest.

The delicacy of the point of honor, one of the delusions of the privileged order, compelled the nobility to *decorate the most abject submission with the forms of liberty.* It was necessary that they should preserve, in

their connection with their master, a spirit of chivalry; that they should engrave upon their shield, 'FOR MY MISTRESS AND KING,' that they might be thought voluntarily to choose the yoke which they wore; and thus blending honor with slavery, they endeavored to bow without debasement. Grace was, if I may be allowed the expression, in their situation, a necessary policy, as that only could give the appearance of choice to obedience.

The king, on his part, duly considering himself, in some instances, as the dispenser of glory, and the representative of public opinion, could recompense only by applause, and punish only by degradation. He was obliged to support his power by a kind of public assent, which was doubtless principally directed by his will, but which frequently manifested itself independent of that will. Ties of the most delicate nature, and prejudices artfully conducted, formed the connection of the first subjects with their governor: these connections required great art and quickness of mind: grace was requisite in the monarch, or at least in the dispensers of his power; taste and delicacy were necessary in the choice of favors and of favorites, in order that neither the commencement nor the limits of the royal authority might be discerned. Some of its rights must be exercised without being acknowledged, some acknowledged without being exercised; and moral considerations were embraced by opinion with such subtlety, that one bad stroke of politics was universally felt, and might be the ruin of a minister, notwithstanding any support that government should be inclined to give him.

The king, of course, must call himself the first gentleman of his kingdom, that he might the more readily exercise a boundless authority over gentlemen; and to strengthen that authority over the nobility, a certain portion of flattery was necessarily directed to them. Arbitrary power not even then allowing a freedom of opinion, both parties perceived the necessity of pleasing each other, and the means of succeeding therein were multiplied. Grace and elegance of manners gradually passed from the customs of the court into the writings of literary men. The most elevated station, the source of all favor, is the object of general attention: and as in all free countries, the government gives the impulse to public virtue; so in monarchies, the court influences the mental genius of the nation, because an universal wish is excited to imitate that which distinguishes the most elevated rank.

When the government is so moderate, that no cruelty is apprehended from it, and so arbitrary, that all the enjoyments of power and fortune depend only upon its favor; all those who aspire to that favor, ought to possess a sufficient degree of mental tranquillity to render themselves amiable, and sufficient dexterity to make that frivolous accomplishment conducive to material success. Men of the first class of society in France often aspired to power; but they ran no dangerous hazards in that career; they gamed without risking the loss of a large stake, uncertainty turned only upon the extent of their advantage; hope alone then animated their exertions. Great perils give additional energy to the soul and to the reflecting powers; but security gives to the mind all the charms of ease and readiness.

The animation of gaiety, still more than the polish of grace, banished the remembrance of all distinctions of rank without destroying any: by means of this, grantees dreamed of equality with kings, and poets with nobles; and inspired even the higher ranks with a more refined idea of their advantages, which, after a short forgetfulness, were called again to memory with renewed pleasure; and the highest perfection of taste and gaiety was the result of this universal desire to please.

The affectation in ideas and sentiments, imported from Italy to spoil the taste of all the European nations, was at first prejudicial to the grace of the French; but



the understanding being more enlightened, reverted consequently to simplicity. Chaulieu, La Fontaine, and Madame de Sevigne, were the most unaffected writers, and plainly proved themselves to be possessed of inimitable grace. The Italians and the Spaniards were actuated by a desire to please the softer sex; but nevertheless they were far from equalling the French in the delicate art of adulation. The flattery which serves ambitious purposes, requires much more understanding and skill than that which is addressed only to the fair sex; all the passions of mankind, and all their different vanities, must be artfully studied, when the combination of the government and the manners is such that the success of men in their dealings with each other depends on their mutual talents of pleasing, and those talents are the only means to obtain eminent situations in power.

In France, grace and taste were not only conducive to the highest interests, but both the one and the other were preservatives against the misfortune they most dreaded, namely, ridicule. Ridicule is, in many respects, an aristocratical power; the more ranks there are in society, the more connections exist between those ranks, and the greater is the necessity to know and to respect them. Among the higher classes are established certain customs, certain laws of politeness and elegance, which serve, so to speak, as a signal for rallying, and to be ignorant of which would betray a habit of different manners and different society. Those men who constitute these first classes, having at their disposal all the favors of the state, must necessarily have great sway over the public opinion; for with the exception of a very few instances, power consists of good taste, interest has a certain portion of grace, and the happy are beloved.

That class which, in France, prevailed over the whole nation, was privileged to take up the slightest absurdities; and as the *ridiculous* had the most striking effects upon the minds of the people, they were universally solicitous to shun the lash of ridicule. The apprehension of it was often an obstacle to originality of genius; it might also in the political career, be detrimental to the energy of action; but it developed in the minds of the French a kind of perspicacity singularly worthy of observation. Their writers had a greater insight into characters, and more ability to depict them, than any other nation: being obliged incessantly to study what might give offence or pleasure in society, this interest rendered them very observing.

Moliere, and, even since his time, some other comic writers, are superior in that walk to all the authors of any other nation. The French do not, like the English and the Germans, search deeply into the sentiments occasioned by misery; they accustom themselves so much to shun it, that they cannot be well acquainted with its results: but those characters that give rise to comic effects, as, for instance, men seduced by vanity, deceived by self-love, or deceiving others through pride, that multitude of beings subservient and devoted to the opinion of others; no nation on earth has ever arrived at the skill of painting these so well as the French.

Gayety leads us back to natural ideas; and although the *bon ton* of French society was entirely formed upon fictitious grounds, it is to the gayety of that society that we must absolutely attribute all that remains of truth in ideas, and in the manner of expressing them.

There certainly was not much philosophy in the conduct of the greater part of enlightened characters; they were themselves often subject to the very failings which they condemned in their own works: nevertheless, the effect of their writings and conversations was heightened by a sort of homage paid to philosophy; the object of which was to show, that they could

reason as well as the mind was capable of reasoning; and that, if necessary, they could laugh at their own ambition, their pride, and even their rank, although they were positively determined not to renounce an atom of any one of them.

The court wished to please the nation, and the nation the court; the court pretended to philosophy, and the city to *bon ton*. The courtiers, when they associated with the inhabitants of the capital, wished to display a personal merit, a character, and a genius peculiar to themselves; and the inhabitants of the capital exhibited an irresistible attraction to the polished manners of the courtiers. This reciprocal emulation did not accelerate the progress of solid and exalted truth; but there was not one ingenious idea, not one delicate shade, that self-interest suffered to remain undiscovered to the mind.

A very animated work by Agrippa d'Aubigne, more than two centuries back, distinguished the real and the apparent, *l'etre et le paroître*, in his delineation of the character of a Frenchman, the Duke d'Epemon. In the ancient system of things, all the French were more or less attentively engaged by the *apparent*, because the theatre of society inclines particularly to that side. The external appearance, indeed, ought to be attended to, when there is no opportunity to judge of any thing but the manners; and in France, it was perfectly excusable to wish to succeed in society, since there existed no other field for the display of talents, and for gaining the notice of those in power. And, moreover, what numerous subjects for comedy must be found in a nation where the manners, not the actions, are the test of reputation! All the studied graces and ridiculous pretensions, were inexhaustible sources of humour and comic scenery.

The influence of women is necessarily very great, when all events take place in the drawing-room and when all characters are judged by their conversation: in such a case, women become a supreme power, and whatever pleases them is assiduously cultivated. The leisure which monarchy left to the generality of distinguished men in every department, conducted very much to bring the pleasures of the understanding and of conversation to perfection.

Power was attained in France neither by labor nor by study; a *bon mot*, some peculiar gracefulness, was frequently the occasion of the most rapid promotions: and the frequent examples of this inspired a sort of careless philosophy, a confidence in fortune, and a contempt for studious exertions, which led every mind to be agreeable and accommodating. When diversion is not only permitted, but often useful, a nation ought to attain the utmost point of perfection to which it can be carried.

Nothing similar to this will ever be witnessed in France whilst under a government of a different nature, however it may be constituted; which will be a convincing proof, that what was called French genius and French grace, were only the result of monarchical institutions and manners, such as they have for many past ages existed in France.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### OF LITERATURE IN THE AGE OF LOUIS XIV.\*

The reign of literature has been revived in Europe by the study of the ancients; but not till a considerable time after its revival, was an imitation of the ancients the guide of literary taste. The French cult

\* I shall not analyze all the particulars relating to French literature; all that can be interesting, has been already said on this subject. I confine myself simply to trace the path pursued by genius from the age of Louis XIV. to the revolution in 1789.



vated the Spanish style of writing at the commencement of the seventeenth century; and this style had a degree of grandeur peculiar to itself, which preserved the French authors from some faults of Italian taste, then diffused all over Europe. Corneille, who first introduced the era of French genius, was greatly indebted to his study of the Spanish character.

The age of Louis XIV., the most remarkable of all in the annals of literature, is very inferior, in respect of philosophy, to the succeeding age. The monarchy, and above all a monarch who esteemed admiration an act of obedience; religious intolerance; and the superstitions at that time still prevalent; put a boundary to the extent of thought: an entire and consistent whole could not be conceived, nor could any analysis be permitted in a certain order of opinions, neither could an idea be followed up through all its connections and windings. Literature, in the age of Louis XIV., was the highest attainment of the imagination; but even this was not a philosophical power, since it was encouraged by an absolute king, and showed no signs of disapprobation at his despotism.

Literature like this, which had no aim but to indulge the sportive imaginations of the mind, could not possess such energy as that which has even gone so far as to make the very throne totter. Sometimes indeed, authors have been seen, who, like Achilles, have taken up weapons of war in the midst of frivolous ornaments; but in general, books at that time did not treat upon subjects of real importance; literary men retired to a distance from the active interests of life. An analysis of the principles of government, an examination into religious opinions, a just appreciation of men in power, every thing, in short, that could lead to any applicable result, was strictly forbidden them.

To publish such a work as *Telemachus*, was then a bold step: yet *Telemachus* contains only truths modified by a monarchical spirit. Massillon and Flechier hazarded some independent principles under the mask of religious errors; Pascal lived entirely in the intellectual world of science and religious metaphysics; La Rochefoucault and La Bruyere described men in the circle of private life with prodigious skill and penetration: but as they touched upon nothing national, those great traits upon political characters, which are seen only in free institutions, could not be included in their designs.

The tragedies of Corneille, who drew nearer to the stormy period of the league, are often tinged with republicanism: but what author in the age of Louis XIV. can boast of a philosophical independence worthy of being compared with that which is so conspicuous in the writings of Voltaire, Rousseau, Montesquieu, Raynal, &c.?

Purity of style cannot be carried to greater perfection than it is in the first rate works of the age of Louis XIV.: and in this respect they ought always to be considered as the models of French literature. They do not indeed possess, Bossuet excepted, all the beauties of eloquence; but they are exempt from all those faults which destroy the effect of the most striking beauties.

An aristocratic society is particularly favorable to the delicacy and polish of style. The habits of life constitute as essential a part of good writing, as even reflection itself: for although ideas may arise in solitude; the garb in which those ideas must be dressed, and the imagery necessary to illustrate them, depend in a great measure upon the impressions which education has left on the mind, and upon the society in which life has been passed.

In every country, but especially in France, words have, as it were, each its particular history: one may have been ennobled by some remarkable occurrence, whilst another may have been degraded by a similar circumstance. *An author may throw a perpetual ridicule upon an expression which he has improperly applied: a custom, an opinion, or a mode of religious*

worship may, by a combination of ideas, dignify or debase the most natural image.

It is in the narrow circle of a few men superior in education or merit to the rest of the world, that the rules and elegance of style can be preserved. Surrounded by an unpolished society, how can we create in ourselves that delicacy of instinct which repels every thing that can be offensive to taste, without even having analyzed whence that repugnance proceeded?

The style in writing represents to the reader, if I may be allowed the observation, the deportment, the accent, the gesture of the person who addresses him: and in no case can vulgarity of manners add to the force either of ideas or of expressions. It is the same with style; there must always be dignity in serious subjects. No thought, no sentiment, by this means loses its energy; elevation of language simply preserves that manly dignity in the presence of men, which he who lays himself open to their judgments ought never to lose sight of. For that assemblage of unknown persons whom an author, while writing, admits to a knowledge of himself, await not his familiarity; and the majesty of the public would be astonished, not without reason, at the assurance of the author.

Republican independence should therefore endeavor to imitate the correctness of those who wrote in the age of Louis XIV., in order that useful thoughts may be diffused, and that works of philosophy may at the same time rank as classical works in literature.

Many disputes have arisen, whether the imitation of nature, or the beautiful in idea, ought to be preferred in tragedies. I refer my readers to the second part of this work, to some reflections upon that system of tragedy most suitable to a republican state: this discussion belongs not to the present chapter.

The author who has attained the highest degree of perfection in style, in poetry, and in the art of painting,—the beautiful in idea, is Racine; a writer who, of all others, gives the most competent idea of the influence which laws and manners possessed over dramatic works in the reign of Louis XIV. The spirit of chivalry had introduced among the principles of honor a sort of delicacy, which necessarily gave rise to a sort of compact: that is to say, there existed a certain degree of heroism, indispensable as it were to the noblesse, and of which it was not allowable to suppose that a nobleman could be destitute: this point of honor, so susceptible that it could not tolerate even amongst the nearest relations the slightest expression capable of wounding the most exalted pride; this point of honor gave laws also to theatrical imitations, and to the sports of the imagination; and the diversity of characters that might be portrayed, were also obliged to be within the prescribed limits. Authors indeed were not allowed to carry that diversity to the full extent of nature; and a certain respect for the higher classes withheld them from representing any thing that might tend to degrade them in the public esteem.

Adulation towards the monarch raised to still greater perfection the beautiful in idea. A nation is annihilated when it is composed only of the worshippers of an individual. The factitious greatness which it was necessary to attribute to Louis XIV., inclined the poets always to represent some characters as perfect as that which flattery had invented. The imagination of the writer was at least to keep pace with his eulogiums; and the same model was frequently repeated in the scenes of the drama. The character of Achilles, in 'Iphigenia,' had some traits of French gallantry; and in 'Titus' again were found allusions to Louis XIV. The greatest genius in the world, Racine, did not allow himself to express such bold conceptions as his mind perhaps might have suggested to him; because those who would be the judges of them, were incessantly in his thoughts.

The formidable, but unknown, public of a tumultu-

ous audience inspires less timidity than the *Areopagus* of a court, of which the author would wish personally to captivate each individual judge. Before such a tribunal, taste appears still more essential than energy. We feel a wish to attain great effects by many gradual shades; and in such a case those methods of which Shakspeare availed himself in order to attract the multitude who were adorners of his productions, would be improper and unavailing. The description of love, in the reign of Louis XIV., was also subjected to some acknowledged rules. Gallantry towards the women, introduced by the laws of chivalry, the polish of the court, the elegant language which the pride of rank reserved to itself as an additional distinction, all served to render the undertaking more arduous. These difficulties enhanced the reputation of him who had skill sufficient to overcome them; but at the same time, a far-fetched or affected expression frequently chilled his emotion. A taste for madrigals displayed a perfect *sang-froid* even whilst attempting to describe the impetuosity of passion; and this of course gave birth to a language which was neither that of reason, nor of love.

Even Racine himself was somewhat deficient in the knowledge of the human heart, under those relations which philosophy alone can render evident. But if deep reflection was requisite to discern what might even yet have improved such master-pieces as his were; the limits of philosophy, in the age of Louis XIV., are discerned much more evidently in those literary works which belong not to the drama. These limits are one of the principal causes of the want of excellence in the historians.

The religious wars had given birth to a spirit of party, which converts many histories into theological briefs; the spirit of society, although different from the spirit of party, is equally far from the truth, and alters facts with as unsparring a hand. In fine; the feudal code founding all institutions and all power upon pristine rights rendered sacred by time, it was not allowable to speak truth in what related to past events, however remote they might be; present authority depended upon them: errors of every kind impeded historians on all subjects, or, what was still more to be lamented, they themselves adopted those very errors as truths.

Man, surrounded by so many long-respected institutions, so many famous decisions, so many received conformities, could not appeal from them to the independence of his own reflections; his reason could not examine into every thing, and his mind was never freed from the yoke of general opinion; even solitude could not bring it back to natural ideas; the ascendancy of the monarch, and the prevalence of monarchical reverence, had penetrated into the conviction of all. This was not a despotism which enslaved either the mind or the soul; but it was a despotism that appeared universally to be so blended with the nature of things, that the people conformed to it as they would to that invariable order which must necessarily exist.

One asylum yet remained,—religion: sheltered by this, one individual, Bossuet, asserted some bold truths. All the interests of life were subjected to the monarch; but, in the name of death, even to him equality might be mentioned. These dogmas, these ceremonies, this religious pomp, were then only barriers against power: this power was cited before eternity; for if men abandoned to an individual the disposal of their existence, they could appeal from him to a God who makes even kings to tremble.

In our days, if the absolute power of one individual were established in France, we could no longer have recourse to those majestic ideas which, levelling all human distinctions, offer the only consolation for casual misfortunes: for philosophical reasoning would an-

pose fewer obstacles to tyranny, than the unshaken belief and the intrepid devotion of religious enthusiasm.

## CHAPTER XX.

FROM THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY TO THE YEAR 1739.

In this epoch, literature has given impulse to philosophy. After the death of Louis XIV., the same abuses being no longer defended by the same power, reflection turned upon religious and political subjects, and a mental revolution commenced.

The English philosophers known in France, have been one of the primary causes of that spirit of analysis which has led the French writers to such unusual lengths; but independent of this particular cause, the age immediately succeeding an age of literature, is in all countries, as I have endeavored to prove, that of reflection. Happy if the French be so favored by destiny, that the thread of metaphysical progress, of scientific discoveries, and philosophical ideas, be not yet broken in their hands!

Liberty of opinion commenced in France by attacks upon the Catholic religion; at first, because such attacks were the only daring steps that produced no ill consequences to their author; and secondly, because Voltaire, the first man who made philosophy popular in France, found in this subject an inexhaustible fund of pleasantries, all in the French taste, and all in the taste of those about the court.

The courtiers, not aware of the intimate connection which must exist between all prejudices, hoped at once both to maintain their posts in stations founded upon error, and to deck themselves with a spirit of philosophy: they wished apparently to disdain some of their advantages, but nevertheless in reality to preserve them: they thought that only those who profited by abuses, could clear them up; and that the vulgar at large would continue in their credulity, whilst a small number of individuals enjoying, as formerly, their exalted rank, would add a superiority of understanding to that of their situation in life; they flattered themselves that they might yet for a long time look upon their inferiors as their dupes; and that those inferiors would never be tired of such a situation. No man was better able than Voltaire to profit by this disposition of the nobles of France; indeed it is not impossible that he himself partook of it.

Voltaire loved grandeur and royalty; he wished rather to enlighten society than to change it. The animated grace, the exquisite taste conspicuous in all his works, rendered it almost essential to him to be judged by the spirit of aristocracy. He wished learning to become fashionable, and philosophy to become general; but he did not call forth the strongest emotions of nature; he did not summon from the depth of the forests, like Rousseau, the tempest of primitive passions to shake the government upon its ancient foundations. By pleasantry, and the shafts of ridicule, Voltaire gradually weakened the importance of some errors; he destroyed the roots of that which the subsequent storm so easily overturned; but he neither foresaw nor wished for that revolution to which he prepared the way.

A republic founded upon a system of philosophical equality not even entering into his ideas, could not of course be his secret aim. There is no distant plan, no concealed design perceptible in his writings: that perspicuity and ease which distinguish his works, display every thing to the view, and leave nothing for the imagination to divine.

Rousseau, whose mind was suffering and wounded by the injustice, the ingratitude, and the blind contempt of careless and frivolous men, worn out moreover by the social order that

course to ideas purely natural : whereas the fate of Voltaire was singularly happy in society, in the fine arts, and in monarchical civilization ; he must even have feared to subvert the object of his attacks. The merit and the interest felt in most of his sallies of wit, depend upon the very existence of those prejudices which he ridicules.

Those works, the merit of which depends in any degree upon temporary circumstances, cannot preserve a lasting reputation. They may be considered as describing the manners of the day, but not as immortal productions. A writer who searches only into the immutable nature of man, into those thoughts and sentiments which must enlighten the mind in every age, is independent of events ; they can never change the order of those truths which such a writer unfolds. But some of the prose works of Voltaire are already in the same case with the Provincial Letters ; the turn of them is admired, but the subject is cast off and forsaken. How is it possible that, in the present day, we should relish pleasantries upon the Jews, or upon the Catholic religion ? Their day is past : whereas the philippics of Demosthenes are always suitable to present times, because he addresses himself to men ; and men are the same now as they were then.

In the age of Louis XIV. to bring the art of writing itself to perfection was the object of authors in general ; but in the eighteenth century literature has assumed a very different character. It is no longer an art merely ; it is a power ; it is become a weapon to the human mind, which hitherto it had only instructed and amused.

Pleasantry was, in the time of Voltaire, like the fables in the east, an allegorical manner of making truth to be heard, even whilst subjected to the dominion of error. Montesquieu attempted this sort of railery in his Persian Letters ; but he had not the natural gayety of Voltaire, the want of which, however, was compensated by his brilliant understanding. Works of still greater merit leave proofs of this truth : his reflections have given birth to thousands of new reflections. He has analyzed political questions without enthusiasm, and without any positive system. He has displayed them all to view ; others have made their choice : but should the social art ever attain in France the certainty of science in its principles and in its application, it is from Montesquieu that the commencement of its progress ought to be dated.

To him succeeded Rousseau : he has discovered nothing, but he has set all in a blaze : and the sentiment of equality, which is productive of many more disturbances than the love of liberty, and which gives birth to inquiries of a totally different order, and events of a far more terrible nature :—the sentiment of equality, both in its majesty and in its meanness, is portrayed in every line of the writings of Rousseau ; and gains entire possession of mankind as well by means of the virtues as the vices of his nature.

Voltaire has entirely engrossed to himself that epoch of philosophy when men, like children, must be taught to sport with what they fear : then comes the moment, boldly to examine these formidable objects ; and then finally to conquer and become masters of them. Voltaire, Montesquieu, and Rousseau have traced these various periods in the progress of reflection, and, like the gods of Olympus, they have gone over the ground in three steps.

The literature of the eighteenth century is enriched by the philosophical spirit which characterizes it. Purify of style and elegance of expression are incapable of farther progress after Racine and Fenelon : but the fashion of analyzing, by giving more independence to the mind, has attracted reflection to a multitude of new objects. *Philosophical ideas have found admittance in tragedies, in tales, and even in writings of mere amusement : and Voltaire, uniting the grace of the prece-*

*embellished the charm of wit by all those truths, the application of which had till then been considered as impossible.*

Voltaire has been the occasion of great improvement in the dramatic art although he has not equalled the poetry of Racine. But without imitating the incoherences of the English tragedies, and not even allowing himself to bring forward all their beauties upon the French stage, he has portrayed grief with more energy than any of the authors who preceded him. In his productions, the incidents are more striking, passion is described more naturally, and theatrical style is brought nearer to truth.

When philosophy is progressive, every thing improves in proportion, and sentiments are displayed as well as ideas. A certain servility or subjection of mind prevents mankind from making observations upon their own feelings,—from confessing those sentiments to themselves or expressing them to others : philosophical independence, on the contrary, makes them better acquainted with themselves, and with human nature in general. The tragedies of Voltaire, therefore, are most felt ; those of Racine are most admired. The sentiments, the incidents, the characters, presented to us by Voltaire, make a deeper impression on my memory. To promote the perfection of morality itself the theatre ought always to present models above us ; but a much greater degree of sympathy is excited when the author brings our own feelings and sentiments to our consideration.

What character can be more affecting on the stage, than that of Tancred ? Phedra inspires astonishment and creates enthusiasm ; but her character is not that of a woman of sensibility and delicacy. We remember Tancred as a hero whom we had known, as a friend whom we had regretted. Bravery, melancholy, love, all that can at once make us value, yet sacrifice life,—all the luxurious enjoyments of the mind, are united in this admirable subject.

To defend the country from which he is banished ; to save the woman he loves, even while he believes her guilty ; to load her with acts of generosity ; to be revenged of her only by devoting himself to death ; how sublime, and yet how much in unison with every mind of sensibility ! This heroism, explained by love, does not astonish until reflected upon. The interest which the piece inspires, so transports the audience, that every individual present believes himself capable of the same exalted conduct.

The great admiration of Amenaide for Tancred, and the respectful esteem of Tancred in return, greatly add to the poignancy of affliction. To Phedra, who is not beloved, of what importance can be the loss of life ! But when we see happiness annihilated by fate ; mutual confidence, that first of blessings, destroyed by calumny ; the impression we feel, is so strong, that it could not be tolerated on the stage, if Tancred were to die without an assurance from Amenaide that she had never ceased to love him.

The heart-breaking scene in which we learn the catastrophe, is a kind of consolation. Tancred expires just at the moment he most wished to live ; nevertheless he dies with more consoling reflections.

And indeed who is there that would not wish to descend into the grave with affections that render life an object of regret, rather than feel a solitariness of heart that was a death-blow to us even while we lived ! In that uncertain future, of which we have only a confused idea beyond the term of our existence in this world, we hope perhaps those friends who loved us here may follow us : but if we have ceased to esteem their virtues, and to confide in their affection, where then could be the solace of such a hope ! What emotion would then remain to direct the mind to heaven ! In whose heart would be left any traces of the transitory creature who solicits eternity ! What petitions would then be

offered to the supreme being to entreat him not to break the chain of recollection which blends, as it were, two separate existences together!

Those reflections which recall in any shape to the minds of men what is common to them all, must ever occasion great emotion; and it is in this point of view that the philosophical reflections introduced by Voltaire in his tragedies, when those reflections are not used too freely, occasion an universal interest to be felt throughout the various circumstances he brings forward on the stage. I will examine, in the second part of this work, whether some new beauties may not be adapted to the French theatre, that bear a still closer resemblance to nature; but it cannot be denied, that in this respect Voltaire has gained a step in the dramatic art, and the power of theatrical effect has arisen from it.

The literary lustre of the eighteenth century is principally due to its prose-writers. Bossuet and Fenelon ought undoubtedly to be quoted as the first who set the example of uniting in the same language all prosaic correctness and poetical imagination. But how much has the art of writing been enriched in France by Montesquieu's energetic expression of thought, and Rousseau's eloquent descriptions of passion! The regularity of versification inspires a sort of pleasure, to which prose can never attain; it is a physical sensation which excites emotion or enthusiasm; it is a difficulty surmounted, of the merit of which connoisseurs can judge, but it inspires even the ignorant with a pleasure they cannot analyze.

But we feel it incumbent upon us also to acknowledge all the charms of the poetical images and specimens of eloquence witnessed, when prose brought to perfection offers us such fine examples.

Racine himself sometimes sacrifices style to the rhyme, to the hemistich, and to the metre: and if it be true that just expression, that which gives even the most delicate shade, even the most fugitive trace of the connection of our ideas; if it also be true that this expression is unique in the language, that even to the choice of grammatical transitions of articles between the words, all may serve to illustrate an idea, to awaken a remembrance, to discard a useless affinity, to transmit an emotion just as it is felt, in a word, to bring to perfection that sublime talent which makes life communicate with life, and reveals to an isolated being the secrets of another heart, and the deeply felt impressions of another mind; if it be true that superior delicacy of style would not allow in eloquent periods even the slightest alteration without offending the ear; if there be but one method of composition that can be deemed perfect, is it possible, that whilst adhering to the prescribed rules of poetry, that one method can always be found?

Harmony of style has made a great progress in prose-writing; but this harmony ought not to imitate the musical effect of fine versification. If it were attempted, prose would become monotonous, the choice of expressions would no longer be free, and all the advantages thence arising would never repay the trouble of the attempt. The harmony of prose is that which nature herself points out to our organs. Under the influence of any emotion, the tone of the voice is softened when imploring compassion; its accents become more firm when expressing any generous determination; it is raised and dropped when we wish to bring over to our own opinions a wavering audience around us: genius, or talent, is the power of calling to our aid at pleasure, all the resources, all the effects of natural emotions; it is that susceptibility of soul which makes us feel, merely from the impressions of the imagination, those emotions which others experience only in consequence of events that have occurred in their own life. The finest specimens of prose at present known, are those in which the passions themselves, invoked by genius, come eloquent. A man destitute of literary talents

would express himself in the very style we so much admire, if writing under the pressure of deeply felt calamity.

On the plains of Philippi, Brutus exclaimed, 'Oh Virtue, art thou but a name?' A tribune of the Roman soldiers leading them to inevitable death in order to force an important post, thus addressed his followers: 'There is a necessity to go, but there is no necessity to return.' *Ire illuc necesse est, unde redire non necesse.* Arria said to Pætus, when she presented him with the dagger, '*Pate non dolet.*' Bossuet pronouncing an eulogium on Charles I. in the funeral oration upon the death of the Queen, suddenly stops, and pointing to her coffin, says, 'That heart which existed but for him, awakes, dust as it is, and beats again, even under the pall, at the name of a husband so beloved.' Emilius, at the point of avenging himself of his mistress, exclaims, '*Malheureux! fais lui donc un mal que tu ne sentes pas.*' In these expressions, how are we to distinguish what ought to be attributed to invention, and what to history; what to imagination, and what to reality? Heroism, eloquence, love, all that can exalt the soul and raise it above selfish considerations, all that aggrandizes and ennobles it, is the result of violent emotions.

From the moment when literature concerned itself with matters of serious import; from the moment when authors saw a ray of hope that they might influence the fate of their fellow-citizens by the display of some particular principles, and by rendering some truths peculiarly interesting; prose-writing gradually rose to perfection.

M. de Buffon took delight in the art of writing, and carried it to a great length; but although he lived in the eighteenth century, he has not stepped into the circle of literary fame: he only aims in good language to write a good work; he asks nothing of mankind but their approbation; he does not seek to influence them, nor to inspire them with strong emotions; words are his aim, as well as the means to attain that aim; he therefore has never reached the perfection of eloquence. In countries where talents may change the fate of empires, those talents increase in proportion to the magnitude of the object to which they aspire: an aim so exalted incites to eloquent writing, by acting on those feeling which also render us capable of magnanimous actions. All the rewards, all the distinctions which monarchy can offer, will never inspire that energy which arises from the hope of being useful. Philosophy itself is but a frivolous employment in a country where the understanding cannot penetrate into the institutions. When reflection cannot amend or soften the lot of mankind, it becomes unmanly or pedantic. He who writes without having influenced, or without a wish to influence the destiny of others, has neither character, force, nor volition in his style.

Towards the eighteenth century, some French authors conceived for the first time a hope of usefully propagating their speculative ideas: their style has consequently assumed a bolder tone, their eloquence a warmth more genuine. A man of letters, living in a country where the patriotism of the citizen is only a barren sentiment, is, if I may be allowed so to express myself, obliged to fancy himself under the influence of passions, in order to describe them; to create fictitious emotions, to be enabled perfectly to comprehend their effects; to qualify himself to write, and in short, if possible, abstract himself, as it were, from his own existence, in order to examine what literary measures may be adopted from his opinions and sentiments.

Already we may perceive the outline of the great change which political liberty must produce in literature, by comparing the writers of the age of Louis XIV., with those of the eighteenth century: but what strength would not talents attain in a government where there are a well-entitled

or the orator, feels himself ennobled by the moral or political importance of the subject on which he treats : if he pleads for the victim before the assassin, for liberty in presence of the oppressor ; if the unfortunate wretches in whose defence he speaks, hear, tremblingly the sound of his voice, turn pale if he hesitates, and lose all hope if an expression of triumph escapes from the conviction of his mind ; if the fate of the country itself is confided to him ; he ought to endeavor to withdraw the selfish from their own interests and from their terrors, to excite in his auditors that emotion, that frenzy of virtue, which a certain lofty eloquence may inspire for a moment, even in the bosoms of the guilty. How is it possible under such circumstances, and with such a design, that he should not even surpass himself ? He will find ideas and expressions which the ambition of doing good can alone inspire ; he will feel all the powers of his genius raised ; and when at some future time he shall read over what he has written, or what he recited at such a particular period, he may exclaim with Voltaire, when he heard some of his own verses repeated, 'No, it could not be I who wrote that.' And in fact it is not man independently, it is not man aided only by his own individual faculties, who attains by his own exertions to those strokes of eloquence whose irresistible authority disposes of our moral existence entirely at his own pleasure ; but man, when he feels himself called upon to

defend and protect suffering innocence ; man, when enabled to overthrow despotism ; man, in a word, when he devotes himself to the happiness of the whole human race, who then believes and really feels a kind of supernatural inspiration.

And does the revolution inspire France with such emulation and such glory ? This shall be inquired into in the second part of this work.

I here end my reflections upon the past, and shall now proceed to examine the general state of things, and offer some conjectures relative to the future. More lively interests and passions still in existence will judge of this new kind of search ; but I feel, nevertheless, that I cannot analyze the present so impartially, as if time had already swallowed up the years of which we treat.

Of all the abstractions arising from solitary meditation, the most natural apparently is to make general observations upon the scenes passing before our eyes, as we should do upon the history of preceding centuries. A habit of reflection, more than any other employment in life, detaches us from all personal interests. The chain of ideas and the gradual progression of philosophical truths, fix the mind's attention much more than the passing incoherent and partial relations which may exist between our own private history and the events of the time in which we live.

## ANCIENT AND MODERN LITERATURE.

### PART SECOND.

OF THE PRESENT STATE OF MENTAL IMPROVEMENT IN FRANCE, AND OF ITS FUTURE PROGRESS.

#### CHAPTER I.

##### GENERAL PLAN OF THE SECOND PART.

I have traced the history of the human mind from the time of Homer to the year 1789. National pride led me to consider the French revolution as a new era in the intellectual world. Perhaps it is only a calamitous event !—perhaps the influence of long habits will not for a certain period of time suffer this event to be productive of one profitable institution, or one philosophical result : but whatever may be the case, as this second part will contain some general ideas respecting the progress of the human mind, it may not be useless to develop those ideas, even should the application of

I think it always interesting to examine what would be the prevailing character of the literature of a great and enlightened people, in whose country should be established liberty, political equality, and manners in unison with its institutions : there is but one nation in the world to whom some of these reflections may be applied in the present day ;—America. The American literature, indeed, is not yet formed ; but when their magistrates are called upon to address themselves on any subject to the public opinion, they are eminently gifted with the power of touching all the affections of the heart, by expressing simple truth and pure sentiments ; and to do this, is already to be acquainted with the most useful secret of elegant style. Let it be admitted then, that the following reflections, although intended for France in particular, are nevertheless well

ceptible, under various relations, of a more general application.

Whenever I speak of the modifications and amendment which may be hoped for in the French literature, I always suppose the existence and the duration of liberty and the political equality. Must it then be concluded, that I believe in the possibility of this liberty, and this equality? I do not undertake to solve such a problem, still less would I resolve to renounce such a hope: my aim is to endeavor to discover what influence over mental improvement and over literature would arise from the institutions necessary to such principles, and the manners which such institutions would introduce.

It is impossible to separate these observations, when they have France for their object, from the effects already produced by the revolution itself; those effects, it must be allowed, are detrimental to manners, to literature, and philosophy. In the course of this work I have shown how the confused mixture of the northern and eastern people had occasioned barbarism for a time, although the eventual result was a very considerable progress both in mental improvement and in civilization. The introduction of a new class into the French government may probably introduce a similar effect. This revolution may, in the course of time, enlighten a larger portion of mankind; but for many years vulgarity of manners and opinions must in many respects cause both taste and reason to become retrograde.

No one can deny that literature has suffered greatly in France, since the terrific system has swept away men, characters, sentiments, and ideas. But without analyzing the result of that dreadful period, which must be considered as totally out of the common course of things,—as a prodigious phenomenon which no stated or regular custom can either explain or produce, it is the nature of a revolution to check, for some years, the progress of mental improvement, and to give it afterwards a new impulsion. We must then first examine the two principal obstacles which oppose the development of the mind,—the loss of polished manners, and that of emulation, which the rewards of public opinion might excite. When I shall have laid before my readers the different ideas arising from this subject, I shall consider of what degree of perfectibility literature and philosophy are susceptible, if we correct ourselves of revolutionary errors, without abjuring with them those truths which interest all Europe in its reflections upon the foundation of a republic virtuous and free.

My conjectures upon the future shall be the result of my observations upon the past. I have endeavored to prove that the democracy of Greece, the aristocracy of Rome, and the paganism of the two nations, gave a different character to philosophy and the fine arts; that the ferocity of the north being blended with the degenerate manners of the east, and both being softened by the Christian religion, have been the principal cause of the state of the mind in the middle century. I have endeavored to explain the singular inconsistencies in Italian literature by the remembrance of past liberty and habits of present superstition; a monarchy the most aristocratic in its manners, and a royal government the most republican in its customs, have appeared to me the first source of the striking difference between French and English literature. There yet remains to be examined, after the influence which laws, religion, and manners have at all times exercised over literature, what are the changes which the new institutions, in France, may occasion in its writings. If such and such political institutions have had certain results; we may foresee by analogy, how similar or different causes would act upon their respective effects. The new progress in literature and philosophy which I propose to point out, will be a continuation of the development of perfectibility, the grand advancement of which I

have traced from the time of the Greeks. It is easy to show how much our progress in this line would be accelerated, if all those prejudices which now stand in the way of truth were removed, and if nothing remained to philosophy, but to proceed directly from demonstration to demonstration.

Such is the method adopted by the sciences, which every day advance to some new discovery, and never lose what they have gained. Yes, even if that future, on which my imagination delights to dwell, be still far distant; it may nevertheless be useful to inquire into what it may be. We must overcome the despondency which some terrible epochs have given rise to in the public mind: at such periods, the judgment is obscured by fears or calculations entirely foreign to the immutability of philosophical ideas. It is to obtain reputation or power, that we study the bias of temporary opinions; but if we aspire to think or to write, we ought to consult only the solitary conviction of contemplative reason.

We must banish from our minds the ideas which float around us, and which are indeed only the metaphorical representations of some personal interests; we must alternately take the lead of, or follow the popular opinion: this perhaps precedes, rejoins, or abandons us; but immutable truth abides with us.

Mental conviction cannot, however, be so strong a support as conscious feeling. The dictates of morality, as to action, are never doubtful; but we often hesitate, and frequently repent of our opinions when ill-disposed men take advantage of them, and make them serve as an excuse for their crimes, and the glimmering light of reason does not yet afford a sufficient solace in the calamities of life. Nevertheless, either the understanding is a useless faculty, or mankind must be continually making some new discoveries which may advance beyond the epochs in which they live. It is impossible to condemn reflection to retrace its steps with diminished hopes and increased regrets; the human mind, hopeless of futurity, would sink into the most abject state of degradation. Let us then seek that *future* in literary productions and philosophical ideas; one day, perhaps, those ideas in greater maturity may be applied to institutions; but in the meantime the faculties of the mind may, at least, be usefully directed; they still may be productive of national glory.

Those who, surrounded by human passions and frailties, are possessed of superior talents, will soon be persuaded that those very talents are misfortunes; but they will be found so many benefits, if their possessors can believe in the eventual perfectibility of mind; if they can find new relations between ideas and sentiments; if they can penetrate more deeply into the knowledge of mankind; if they can add one degree of new force to morality; if, in a word, they can flatter themselves with the possibility of uniting, by means of eloquence, the various opinions of all those who are the friends of liberal truths.

## CHAPTER II.

### OF TASTE AND URBANITY OF MANNERS; AND OF THEIR INFLUENCE IN LITERATURE AND POLITICS.

It has for some time been a prevailing opinion in France, that a revolution in literature was necessary, and that the laws of taste in every department ought to be indulged with the greatest possible latitude. Nothing could be more inimical to the progress of literature,—that progress which so effectually promotes the diffusion of philosophical light, and consequently the support of liberty; nothing can be more fatal to refinement of manners, one of the first aims that republican institutions ought to have in view. The fastidious nicety of

some societies of the ancient system have, undoubtedly, no connection with the true principles of taste, which are always in conformity with reason; but some prescribed laws might be abolished without subverting those barriers which point out the path of genius, and preserve both consistency and dignity in oratory as well as composition. The only motive alleged for an entire change in the style and forms which preserve respect and promote reflection, is the despotism which the aristocratic classes of a monarchy exercise over taste and customs. It is therefore useful to mark the defects which may be found in some of the pretensions, pleasantries, and exigencies of the societies of the ancient system, in order to show afterwards with more effect what disgusting consequences, both in literature and politics, have arisen from the boundless audacity, the awkward gayety, and the degrading vulgarity which it has been attempted to introduce in some periods of the revolution. From the opposition of these two extremes, from the factitious ideas of monarchy, and the gross systems of some individuals during the revolution, some just reflections must necessarily accrue respecting the noble simplicity which ought to characterize the oratory, the compositions, and the customs of a republican government.

The French nation was, in some respects, too much civilized; its institutions and social habits had usurped the place of natural affections. In the ancient republics, and above all at Lacedemon, the laws moulded the individual character of each citizen, formed them all upon the same model, and political sentiments absorbed all other sentiments. What Lycurgus effected by his laws in favor of the republican spirit, the French monarchy had done by its powerful prejudices in favor of the vanities of rank.

This vanity engaged almost exclusively the minds of each class; the life of man seemed dedicated to the desire of making a conspicuous figure, to obtain an acknowledged superiority over his immediate rival, and to excite that envy in others, to which he himself in his turn became a prey. From individual to individual, from class to class, suffering vanity could be happy only on the throne; in every other station, from the most elevated to the most abject, men wasted their lives in comparing themselves with their equals or their superiors; and far from rating themselves at their own intrinsic worth, they sought from the opinions of others to know in what estimation they stood with respect to their importance amongst their equals. This spirit of contention upon subjects totally frivolous, except in their influence over happiness; this ardent desire to succeed; this dread of offending; altered and often exaggerated the true principles of natural taste; there was a fashion of the day, a fashion of some particular class, in a word, that which must arise from the general opinion created by similar relations. Societies then existed, which could by allusions to their customs their interests, or even their caprices, ennoble the most hacknied phrases, or proscribe the most simple beauties. If we showed ourselves strangers to these manners in society, we publicly acknowledged ourselves to be of an inferior rank; and inferiority of rank is of itself an unsavory mouthful in a country where a distinction of rank exists. Individuals ridicule individuals, where the people are strangers to an education of liberty; and in France, even with the most exalted mind, it would have been only an absurdity in him who should endeavor to emancipate himself from that prevailing style which was established by the ascendancy of the highest class.

This despotism of opinion being carried too far, must eventually be prejudicial to real talents; the laws of taste and politeness became daily more refined; the manners were continually growing more dissimilar from the impressions of nature. Ease of address existed without freedom of sentiments; polite-

ness divided the people into classes instead of cementing a general union amongst them; and all that natural simplicity requisite to be perfectly graceful, did not prevent men from growing old either in a constant habit of attention, or a pretended inattention to the observance of the least marks of social distinction.

Nevertheless they wished to establish a sort of equality which placed all characters and all talents apparently upon the same level; an equality most undesirable to men of distinguished abilities, but at the same time most consoling to jealous mediocrity. It was necessary to speak and to be silent exactly like other people to know the reigning customs that no innovation might be hazarded; and it was only an assiduous imitation of received habits, that it was possible to acquire a reputation peculiar to ourselves. The art of avoiding the dangers of too brilliant an understanding was, in fact, the only use to which the understanding was applied; and real genius was consequently often smothered by all these fashionable restrictions. This sort of taste, which ought rather to be deemed effeminate than refined, which is shocked at any new effort, at any daring sedition, or even at an energetic expression—checked all the flights of fancy; genius cannot pay a complaisant attention to all these artificial considerations; fame is impetuous, and its tumultuous retinue must break through such slight oppositions.

But society, that is to say, relations without any aim, trifling concerns without subordination, a theatre, where merit was appreciated by marks the most foreign from its intrinsic value; society, I repeat, in France had endued ridicule with such power, that even, men of the most elevated minds could not brave it. Of all the weapons that can destroy the emulation of exalted characters, the most effectual is the aim of ridicule. A quick and subtle penetration into the failings of an exalted character, the weaknesses of brilliant talents, checks that confidence in its own powers, which is often so essential to genius; and the slightest lasting of cold and unfeeling railery may, in a generous heart, prove a mortal wound to that lively hope which animated it to enthusiasm in glory and virtue.

Nature has supplied remedies for the great evils to which man is subject; has balanced genius with adversity, ambition with perils, and virtue with calumny; but ridicule can insinuate itself into life, can attach itself even to estimable qualities, and secretly and imperceptibly undermine them.

Disdainful indifference has also great power over enthusiasm of the most pure kind; grief even loses that eloquence with which nature has endued it, when it meets with a spirit of irony; energy of expression, an unstudied accent, action itself, freedom of action, is inspired by a sort of confidence in the sentiments of those around us; one cold pleasantry annihilates it.

A spirit of ridicule attaches itself to one who may hold an object in the world in high estimation: it laughs at all those who, advanced to a serious period of life, still confide in unfeigned sentiments and weighty interests. In this respect it may not be devoid of a philosophical tendency; but this same discouraging spirit checks the emotions of a soul worked up to enthusiasm; nay, so utterly does it disconcert, as frequently to excite the warmest indignation; it blights every youthful hope; in short, unblushing vice alone is out of the reach of its shafts; that indeed, ridicule seldom attempts to attack, but even shows an inclination to respect the character over which it has no power.

This tyranny of ridicule, which particularly characterized the latter years of the ancient government, after having given a polish to taste, terminated in violent measures, and literature must necessarily have felt the effects of them. In order, therefore, to give more de-

vation of style to composition, and more energy to character, we find it requisite that taste should not be subordinate to the elegant and studied habits of aristocratic societies, however remarkable they may be for the perfection of grace; their despotism would produce the most serious ill-consequences to liberty, political equality, and even to the higher walks of literature: but how greatly would bad taste, carried even to grossness, be prejudicial to literary fame, to morality, to liberty, to all, in fact, of good and great that can exist in the relations and connections between man and man!

Since the revolution, a disgusting vulgarity of manners has often been found united to the exercise of the highest authorities. Now the defects of power are contagious; in France, above all, power not only influences the actions and conversations, but even the secret thoughts of the numerous flatterers who hover about men in power. Courtiers in all governments imitate those whom they extol; they are penetrated with esteem for those who can be serviceable to them; they forget, that even their own interest requires only exterior demonstrations, and that it is not necessary to violate their judgment also, in order to show themselves what they wish to appear.

Bad taste, such as we have seen it to prevail during some years of the revolution, is not only prejudicial to the relations of society and literature, but undermines morality: men indulge themselves in pleasantries upon their own baseness, their own vices, and shamelessly glory in them in order to ridicule those timid minds which still shrink from this degrading mirth. Those free-thinkers of a new description make a boast of their shame, and applaud themselves in proportion to the astonishment they have excited around them.

The gross or cruel expressions which some men in power have frequently allowed themselves in conversation, must in the course of time occasion depravity in their own minds, while they shock the morality of those who hear them.

An excellent law in England interdicts men, whose profession obliges them to shed the blood of animals, from the power of exercising judiciary functions. Indeed, independent of the morality which is founded upon reason, there is also that of natural instinct,—that whose impressions are unforeseen and irresistible. When we accustom ourselves to see animals suffer, we in time overcome the natural repugnancy of the sense of anguish, we become less accessible to pity even for our fellow creatures, at least we no longer involuntarily feel its impressions. Vulgar and ferocious expressions produce in some respects the same effect as the sight of blood, when we accustom ourselves to pronounce them the ideas which they excite become more familiar. Men in battle animate each other to those sentiments of revenge which ought to inspire them, by an incessant use of the grossest language. The justice and impartiality necessary for civil administration make it their duty to employ such forms and expressions as may calm both him who speaks and those who hear.

Good taste, in the language and in the manners of those who govern, by inspiring more respect, renders more terrific measures less necessary. A magistrate whose manners create disgust, can hardly avoid having recourse to persecution in order to obtain obedience.

Kings are wrapt in a certain cloud of illusions and recollections; but deputies commanding in the name of their personal superiority, have need of all the exterior marks of that superiority: and what more evident mark can be found, than that good taste which, discovering itself in every word, gesture, accent, and even in every action, announces a peaceable and stately mind, which comprehends immediately whatever is brought before it, and which never loses sight of its own respectability nor of the respect due to others. It is thus that good taste exercises a real influence in political affairs.

It is a truth generally received, that a spirit of republicanism requires a revolution in the character of literature. I believe this idea true, but in a different acceptation from that generally allowed. A republican spirit requires more correctness in good taste, which is inseparable from sound morality: it also, undoubtedly, permits more energetic beauties in literature, a more philosophical and more affecting picture of the important events of life. Montesquieu, Rousseau, and Condillac, belonged by anticipation to the republican systems; and they have commenced the so desirable revolution in the character of French writings:—this revolution must be completed. The republic necessarily drawing forth stronger passions, the art of portraying must improve, while the subject becomes more exalted; but, by a whimsical contrast, it is in the licentious and frivolous style that authors have most profited by the liberty which literature is supposed to have acquired.

The graceful models which the French possess in their language, may serve as a guide to them, but only as they will also serve foreign nations: the same spirit cannot be renewed in France without the style and habits of what was called good company. In a free country, society will be more engaged by political affairs than by attention to ceremony, or even the charms of pleasantry. In a nation where political equality shall subsist, all kinds of merit may gain admission: and there will no longer exist an exclusive society, dedicated only to bring itself to perfection, and uniting in itself all the ascendancy of fortune and power. Now, unless such a tribunal constantly exists, the youthful mind cannot be formed to that delicacy of feeling, to those fine and correct shades which alone can give to the lighter kinds of writing that grace of conformity, and that finished taste so much admired in some French authors, and particularly in the fugitive pieces of Voltaire.

Literature will disgrace itself completely in France, if we multiply those affected attempts at grace and taste which only serve to render us ridiculous: some genuine humor may, nevertheless, still be found in good comedy; but as to that playful gaiety with which we have been inundated even amidst all our calamities, if we except some individuals who can still remember the times that are past, all new attempts in this style corrupt the taste for literature in France, and place the French below the level of all the serious nations in Europe.

Before the revolution it had been frequently remarked, that a Frenchman, unaccustomed to the society of the first class, made known his inferiority of rank the instant he attempted pleasantry: whilst the Englishman, whose manners are always serious and simple, scarcely ever betrayed by his conversation to what rank in society he belonged. In spite of the distinctions which will long exist between the two nations, French writers must shortly perceive that they no longer have the same means of succeeding in the art of pleasantry; and far from believing that the revolution has given them greater latitude in this respect, they ought more than ever to pay an assiduous attention to good taste; since the confusions in society produced by a revolution, no longer offer any good models, and do not inspire those daily habits which render grace and taste natural to us without the aid of reflection to recal them.

The laws of taste, as applied to republican literature, are in their nature more simple, but not less strict than those which were adopted by the authors of the age of Louis XIV. Under a monarchical government, a multitude of customs sometimes substituted conformity for reason, and the respect paid to society for the sentiments of the heart: but in a republic, taste ought to consist only in the perfect knowledge of all true and durable relations: to fail therefore in the principles of



taste, would be nothing less than ignorance of the true nature of things.

In the time of the monarchy, it was frequently necessary to disguise a bold censure, to veil a new opinion under the form of received prejudices; and the taste which it was necessary to introduce in these different turns, required a singularly delicate ingenuity of mind: but the garb of truth, in a free country, accords with truth itself:—expression and sentiment ought to spring from the same source.

We are not obliged, where liberty reigns, to confine ourselves within the circle of the same opinions, neither is a variety of forms necessary to conceal a sameness of ideas. The interest of progression always exists, since prejudices do not limit the career of thought: the mind, therefore, having no longer to struggle against lassitude, acquires more simplicity, and does not hazard, in order to awaken attention, those studied graces which are repugnant to natural taste.

A bold and very difficult stratagem, allowed under the ancient government, was the art of offending against the manners without wounding taste, and to make a mockery of morality by proportioning delicacy of expressions to indecency of principles. Happily, however, this talent is as ill adapted to the virtue as to the genius of a republic: as soon as one barrier was overthrown, the rest would be disregarded, the relations of society would no longer have the power to curb those whom sacred ties could not restrain.

Moreover, extraordinary quickness of genius is requisite in order to succeed in this dangerous style, which unites grace of expression to depravity of sentiments; and by the strong exercise of our faculties, to which we are called in a republic, we lose that ingenuity. The most delicate touches are necessary to give to immorality that grace, without which even the most abandoned of mankind would repel with disgust the pictures and principles of vice.

In another chapter I shall make mention of the gayety of comedy—that which is so connected with the knowledge of the human heart: but it appears to me probable, that Frenchmen will no longer be cited as examples of that turn of mind at once amiable, elegant, and gay, which constituted the charm of the court. Time will sweep away those few who yet remain as models of this kind, and their remembrance will gradually be lost; for books alone will not suffice to retain such characters in our view. That which is of a more delicate nature than thought itself, can only be acquired by habit: if the society which inspired that kind of instinct, that rapid perception, is annihilated, the same instinct and perception must also perish with it. That which can be taught only by specified habits of life, and not by general combinations, can no longer be learned when these habits of life are ended.

It has been observed by an eminent man, that 'happiness is a serious state': the same may be said of liberty. The dignity of a citizen is more important than that of a subject; for, in a republic, every man of talents is an additional obstacle to political usurpation. Exaltation of character can alone give some weight to this honorable mission with which we are vested by our own conscience.

We have formerly seen men unite dignity of manners with almost constant habits of pleasantry: but this union pre-supposes perfection of taste and delicacy, a conscious feeling of superiority, power, and rank, which cannot be excited by an education of equality. This grace, at once imposing and playful, cannot accord with republican manners; it characterizes too distinctly the habits of rank and fortune. Reflection is more democratic; it increases at the will of chance amongst all men who are sufficiently independent to possess any leisure. Reflection therefore ought to be encouraged by giving our attention less to those

subjects in literature which belong exclusively to the grace of expression.

When we have experienced calamity, we are obliged to reflect; and if national misfortunes exalt the characters of men, it is by correcting them of frivolity, and concentrating in one point, by the terrible power of affliction, their scattered faculties.

Literary taste ought to be directed to a graceful expression of ideas: this will not diminish its utility; for it has been proved, that the most profound reflections, and most noble sentiments, produce no effect, if any striking defects in taste divert the attention, break the chain of thought, or interrupt the succession of emotions which lead the mind to important results and the soul to durable impressions.

We may perhaps censure the weakness of the human mind in attaching itself to some misplaced expression, rather than being uniformly engrossed by what is really essential: but in the most desperate situation in life, nay, even in the hour of death, we frequently see that ridiculous incidents can withdraw the mind from a sense of its own sufferings. How are we to hope, then, that any reflections, or any work can excite so deep an interest as that the defects of style may not divert the attention of the reader! Wonderful talents are requisite to withdraw readers from their self-love; but if the defects in style are such as to offer to judges, of whatsoever kind they may be, an opportunity of displaying their own wit, they seize it immediately, and no longer regard either the sentiments or ideas of the author.

The taste necessary for republican literature, in serious works as well as those of imagination, consists not merely in one talent, but in the perfection of all; and so far from being inimical to depth of sentiment or energy of expression, the simplicity it exacts, and the ease it inspires, are the only suitable ornaments to strength of mind.

Urbanity of manners, as well as good taste, (the former of which indeed constitutes a part of the latter.) are both very important in the literary and political world. Although literature may free itself, in a republic much more easily than in a monarchy, from the empire of any fashion generally received in society, yet it is not possible that the models of the greater number of works of imagination should be taken from other examples than from those which we see daily before our eyes. Now, what would become of those writings which necessarily bear the stamp of the manners of their time, if vulgarity, and that style of behavior which displays the defects and disadvantages of every character, should continue to prevail?

The literary men of France would still retain some ancient works, which might yet have power to affect them; but their imagination would not be inspired by the surrounding objects; it would gain food by reading, but never by any impressions which they themselves might feel. They would hardly ever unite, in their compositions, unaffected observation with nobleness of sentiment. Instead of availing themselves of their recollections, they must strive to banish them; nor, scarcely could even a collected mind ever inspire any truly beautiful ideas.

It will be said, perhaps, that politeness is so trifling an advantage, that even the privation of it would not in the least tarnish those great and valuable qualities which constitute strength and elevation of mind. If the ceremonies of gallantry in the age of Louis XIV. are called politeness, most certainly the first-rate men of antiquity had not the slightest idea of it; yet are they not the less to be esteemed, on this account, as the most striking models that history and imagination could offer to the admiration of succeeding ages: but if politeness is in reality that just propriety of conduct which ought to be maintained by man to man; if it indicates what we think ourselves to be, and what we

really are; if it teaches others what they are, or what they ought to be; a vast number of sentiments and reflections are allied to politeness.

Its forms vary, of course, according to characters, and the same good-will may be expressed with gentleness or with bluntness; but in order to discuss philosophically the importance of politeness, we must consider the general sense of the word in its most extensive acceptation, without dwelling upon every diversity that may arise from each character.

Politeness is that tie which society has established between men who are strangers to each other. Virtue attaches us to our families, to our friends, and to the unfortunate; but in all those relative connections which have not assumed the character of duty, urbanity of manners softens the affections, opens the way to conviction, and preserves to every man the rank which his merit ought to obtain from him in society.

It points out the degree of consideration to which each individual has raised himself; and viewed in that light, politeness becomes the dispenser of those rewards which it has been the object of a whole life to gain. And now let us examine under how many different forms the fatal effects of vulgarity of manners present themselves, and what ought to be the peculiar character of the politeness adapted to a republican spirit.

Women and great men, love and glory, are the only subjects of reflection that can excite any very lively interest in the mind: but how are we to find pure and exalted models of the female character, in a country where the connections of society are not guarded with the most unsullied delicacy? Whence can we take the symbol of virtue, when even women themselves, those independent judges of the conflicts of life, have suffered the noble instinct of elevated sentiments to fade away in themselves? A woman loses part of her attractions, not only by allowing herself the use of indelicate expressions, but even by hearing them, or permitting them in her presence. In the bosom of her family, modesty and simplicity suffice to maintain the respect which is due to females: but in public life still more is requisite: elegance of language, and polish of manners, constitute a part of her dignity, and these alone never fail of inspiring deference.

During the monarchy, a spirit of chivalry, the pomp of rank, the splendor of wealth, every thing indeed that struck the imagination, supplied, in some respects, the place of real merit: but in a republic, women lose much of their dignity, if they cannot inspire awe by those qualities which characterize their natural elevation of mind. The instant we banish an allusion, we must substitute a reality; as soon as we eradicate an ancient prejudice, we stand in need of a new virtue. A republic, far from giving more liberty to the habitual relations of society, (as all its distinctions are founded solely upon personal qualities,) requires in us a more scrupulous attention to preserve ourselves from fault. In this form of government, if our reputation is in the slightest degree tarnished, we cannot, as in a monarchy, renew our consequence by rank, by birth, nor by any advantage not arising from our own intrinsic worth.

What I have said of women is equally applicable to men engaged in stations of eminence. It will be necessary for them to keep up their own consequence with much more assiduity, than in a period when aristocratic dignities efficaciously secured to their possessors the esteem and respect of the multitude. Those existing opinions, which in a republic will be daily attacked or defended, must give a great importance to all that can influence the minds or the imaginations of mankind.

If from the partiality of opinion we pass to the support of legal power; we shall see, that authority is in itself an insupportable weight upon those over whom it extends itself. Those minds which are not created to be slaves, early experience a prejudice, against power.

If a want of feeling in him who commands, aggravates this prejudice, it becomes perfect hatred. Every man of taste and possessing an elevated mind, ought to feel almost the necessity of apologizing for the power he possesses. Political authority is an inconvenience that must be submitted to for the sake of prosperity, order and security: but the depository of this authority ought always to justify himself in some measure by his comportment and his actions.

In the course of the last ten years, we have frequently seen the enlightened governed by the ignorant; whose arrogance of tone, and vulgarity of manners, inspired more disgust than even the shallowness of their intellects. Many of these people confounded republican opinions with unfeeling speeches and gross pleasantries; and spontaneous affection was naturally banished from the republic.

Manners have a greater power of attracting or repelling, than opinions; I will almost venture to assert, even than sentiments. Possessed of a certain liberality of mind, we may live agreeably in the midst of a society professedly devoted to a different party from that to which we ourselves belong; we may even forget serious injuries, or fears, perhaps, justly inspired by the immorality of a man, if the nobleness of his language lulls us into an illusion as to the purity of his mind. But it is impossible to endure that vulgarity of education which betrays itself in every expression, every gesture, in the tone of the voice, the attitude, in short, in all the involuntary marks of the general habits of life.

I do not here speak of the esteem which arises from reflection, but of that involuntary impression which is every moment renewed. In great events, sympathetic minds discover each other by the sentiments of the heart; but in the minutæ of society, we are known to each other by our manners; and vulgarity, carried to a certain length, makes the unfortunate object or witness of it experience a feeling of embarrassment, and even of shame which is altogether insupportable.

Happily, we are seldom compelled to endure vulgarity of manners from a respect to elevation of sentiment: strict integrity inspires a confidence so noble and a tranquillity so pure, that in whatever situation of life we find it, it is easy to discover what a good education would have produced under the same circumstances. That depraved vulgarity of which the French have so often been the victims, was almost always a composition of depraved sentiments: of audacity, cruelty and insolence, which showed themselves under the most odious forms. Conformity is the image of morality; its representative in all circumstances which give no opportunity for proof; it preserves man in the habit of respecting the opinions of man. If the chiefs of a state neglect or condemn this virtue, they will no longer inspire that consequence of which themselves are the first to dispense the rudiments.

Another kind of rudeness may characterize men in power: it is not grossness; it is, if I may express myself so, a kind of political fatuity; the importance which a man attaches to his place; the effect which that place produces on himself, and with which he wishes to inspire others. Many of these instances must have been observed since the revolution. In the ancient government, places of the first importance were filled only by those individuals who had been accustomed from their infancy to the privileges and advantages of high rank; power effected no change in their usual habits; but since the revolution, eminent magistracies have been occupied by men of mean condition in life, and whose character was not naturally elevated: humble then as to their personal merit, but vain of their power, they have thought themselves obliged to adopt new manners, because they have obtained new employments. Of all the effects of vanity, this is the most contrary to that affection and respect which republican magistracies

should inspire; affections and respect are attached to the individual character; and the man who believes himself to be another creature when appointed to any dignity, clearly indicates to you by his own manners, that if he loses it, your esteem and respect are to be transferred to his successor.

How can one man possibly recommend himself to another, better than by that dignity of manners and simplicity of expressions, which, brought forward on the stage, or related in history, inspire almost as much enthusiasm as magnanimous actions? I will, moreover, observe, that a succession of chances may lead a man to make himself conspicuous by some illustrious actions, who is, nevertheless, not gifted with a superior genius or an heroic character: but our words, accents, and comportment to those around us, are alone capable of constituting that true greatness of mind which defies imitation.

Some have thought, that reserve and dignity ought to be substituted for the once gracious manners of the French. Undoubtedly, the first citizens of a free state ought to display more seriousness in their behavior, than the flatterers of a monarch; but too much coldness would check the spring of all generous emotions. A man who is reserved in his manners, necessarily draws some importance to himself by showing he attaches none to you: but the painful sensation which he inspires, produces nothing useful in any shape: it is not familiar insolence, it is true goodness, it is elevation of mind, it is real superiority, which is humbled by this chilling reserve. Thus we see, manners can never be truly perfect but where they encourage the virtues that each individual may possess, and discountenance his vices.

We must not deceive ourselves as to the exterior marks of respect: to smother noble sentiments, or to dry the source of thought, is to produce only the ill effects of fear; but to elevate the minds of others to the standard of our own, to give to the understanding its full play, to encourage that confidence which all generous minds feel in each other; such is the art of inspiring durable respect.

It is of importance to create in France some ties which may connect parties now at variance; and urbanity of manners is an efficacious means to attain this desirable end. It would unite all enlightened men; and this class so firmly connected, might form a tribunal of opinion, which could distribute praise or censure with some justice.

This tribunal might also exercise its influence over literature: authors would know where to find taste and national spirit, and would strenuously endeavor to describe and to aggrandize it. But of all confusion, the most fatal is that which blends all modes of education without distinction, and separates nothing but the spirit of party. Of what consequence is it to agree in our political opinions, if we differ in mind and sentiments? How lamentable is the effect of civil commotions to attach more importance to a similarity of our views in public affairs, than to all those which constitute the only system of fraternity, whose impressions are indelible!

Urbanity of manners can alone soften the asperities of party spirit; it suffers us to see others long before we begin to esteem them, and to converse with them long before any acquaintance commences; and by degrees, that violent aversion which we might feel towards a man whom we had never accosted, grows weaker by the influence of respect and of esteem: hence a sympathy is created, and, in the event, we find our own sentiments inherent in the person whom we had been accustomed to consider as an enemy.

### CHAPTER III.

#### OF EMULATION.

*Amongst the various methods of bringing the pro-*

ductions of the human mind to perfection, we must lay great stress upon the aim and end that are kept in view by those who devote themselves to intellectual studies. Either an indolent or an active life is more suited to the inclination of man, than meditation; and if we would have all the powers of his mind consecrated to the research of philosophical truth, his emulation must be encouraged by the hope of serving his country and influencing the destiny of his fellow-citizens.

Some minds will feed upon the mere pleasure of discovering new ideas; and in sciences requiring accuracy, above all, there are many men for whom this pleasure suffices: but when the experience of reflection tends to moral and political consequences, its object must necessarily be an influence over the destiny of mankind. The aim of those works which appertain to the higher departments of literature is, to effect useful changes; to accelerate some essential progress; to modify, in a word, both institutions and laws. But in a country where philosophy cannot be applied to any real purpose; when eloquence can obtain only literary fame; both one and the other would eventually appear mere occupations for leisure hours, and the incitement to pursue them would daily grow weaker.

I certainly cannot deny, that the situation of France for some years past has been more adverse to the development of talents and understanding, than most of the epochs of history: but I believe, that while we examine what is peculiarly necessary to philosophical emulation, we shall discover why a revolutionary spirit, during the time of its influence, is totally discouraging to reflection; how the ancient government humbled those whom it protected; and by what means the republic might carry to the greatest possible height the noble ambition of mankind to make progressive advances towards reason.

On a first view, we are inclined to think that civil commotions, by annihilating ancient rank, must give to the natural faculties the full use and development of all their powers: and in the beginning, this is undoubtedly the case; but at the expiration of a very short time, the factious party feel towards the enlightened a hatred at least equal to that felt by the ancient usurpers. Violent spirits make enlightened men subservient to their purposes, when they wish to triumph over the established power: but when they only aim to maintain their own ground, they endeavor to testify the most sovereign contempt for reason, and stupidly declare, that mental faculties and philosophical ideas can belong only to effeminate minds: and the feudal code appears again, only under new names.

Every despotic character, in whatsoever situation, detests reflection; and if blind fanaticism be the arm of authority, its most formidable enemy is, undoubtedly, the man who preserves the faculty of judging. Violent men can only be allied to narrow minds; they alone can submit or rebel at the will of their chief.

If revolutionary commotions be prolonged beyond the attainment of the object they ostensibly aim at, authority always descends another step amongst the ignorant classes of society. The greater the mediocrity of men, the more assiduous they seem to suit themselves: they repulse enlightened reason with disdain, as something heterogeneous to their nature, and which must be fatal to their empire.

If any party wish that injustice should triumph: it will, of course, avoid giving any encouragement to mental improvement; a man may disgrace his abilities by devoting them to the defence of injustice; but if the influence of reason is diffused in any nation, it must necessarily tend to bring general morality to perfection.

A revolutionary spirit traces out its own path, and forms its own language; and if any one should wish to vary, merely for the sake of eloquence, those established phrases introduced by party-interest, he would alarm his chiefs: they would tremble to see new senti-

ments and new thoughts advanced, which might serve their cause indeed to-day, but which to-morrow might prove undisciplinable, and take a new direction. There are, if I may be allowed the expression, certain received formulas of cruelty, from which men, even in whom the greatest confidence is placed, are never permitted to deviate.

Suspensions, jealousies, the calculations of ambition, all unite to withdraw superior minds from revolutionary struggles; violent and obscure men range themselves in their proper place only when order is established; in the overthrow of all ideas and sentiments, they think themselves authorized to perpetuate the confusion which exists; and having, amidst their Saturnalia (to borrow the term from antiquity), become masters of talent and of virtue, captive reflection is compelled to bear all the weight of their ignorance and vanity.

In the crisis of popular factions, independence of judgment must be banished first of all. Speech serves only to perpetuate anger, and to fix its first emotions as decrees. The infuriated gave the name of aristocracy to the most republican sentiments in the world,—the love of reason and of virtue. The spirit of cruelty struggles against philosophy, defies education, and shows itself more indulgent to the vices of the heart than to the talents of the mind.

If this state of things continue, we shall no longer possess any distinguished characters except in the career of arms: nothing can damp the ardor for military fame: this always attains the end it desires, and demands from the general voice whatever applause it has a right to expect. But in this free interchange, whence results the glory of authors and philosophers, ideas arise, if I may so say, from that very approbation which men are disposed to grant them.

Bravery may struggle against the ascendancy of a reigning faction; but the inspiration of talent is smothered by it. The tyranny of an individual would not with equal certainty produce such an effect; but the tyranny of a party, often assuming the form of public opinion, inflicts a much deeper wound upon emulation.

If we were to compare the lot of enlightened men under Louis XIV. with that in which they have been involved by revolutionary violence, every thing would appear in favor of the monarchy; but what connection could exist between the patronage of a king and republican emulation, when at length it should assume its real character?

Strength of mind does not wholly display itself, except in attacks upon power; it is by opposition that the English acquire the talents requisite in a prime minister. When, on the contrary, the favors of opinion depend also upon the favor of one man, reflection cannot feel itself free in any of its conceptions: far from devoting itself to the discovery of truth, its powers are in every way limited: the mind must incessantly recoil upon itself. Scarcely is it possible, amidst works of imagination, amidst the domain of invention which legal power infringes not; scarcely, I say, is it possible to forget, that the amusement of the sovereign and his courtiers is the grand point of success that is aimed at.

In all languages, literature may flourish for a certain time without having recourse to philosophy; but when the beauty of expressions, images, and political turns, is no longer new; when all the beauties of antiquity are adapted to modern genius; we feel the necessity of that progressive reason, which each day attains some useful end, and which offers an unlimited field to improve: nevertheless, how was it possible to write philosophically, in a country where the rewards bestowed by one individual, the king, were the representative shadows of glory.

The dependent state of existence of men of literature under the French monarchy, gave them no authority whatever in those important questions which relate to the destiny of mankind. How could they acquire any

dignity in a social order of this nature, unless by showing themselves adverse to it? And what a miserable medley of flattery and truth do we find in the writings of those philosophers, at once incredulous submissive and protected!

Rousseau has freed himself, in this century, from the greater part of prejudices and monarchical considerations. Montesquieu, although with more caution, knew well enough how, when occasion served, to display the boldness of an independent spirit. But Voltaire, who often wished to unite the favors of a court with philosophical independence, shows us the contrast, and evidences the difficulty of such a design in the most forcible manner.

What we call *encouraging* literary men, is to place them below the power from which they receive their recompense; it is to consider literary genius apart from the social world, and from political interests; to treat it in the same manner as we should a talent for music or painting; or, in a word, for any art in which reflection, in which the whole mind indeed must be absorbed.

But to encourage literature itself in its highest walks, and of this I am exclusively speaking in the present chapter; to do this, is indeed true glory; the glory of Cicero, the glory of Cæsar also, and of Brutus. The first saved his country by his oratorical eloquence and his consular talents; the second, in his commentaries, wrote the history of his exploits; and the third, by the eloquence of his style, the philosophical elevation by which his letters are characterized made himself beloved as a man exemplary for the assassination he committed.

It is only in free states that the genius of action can be united to that of reflection. In the ancient government, literary talents almost always pre-supposed the absence of political ones. A turn for public business cannot be discovered by any given signs, until it is displayed in important posts; men of mediocrity are interested in persuading others that they alone are possessed of this talent; and in order to gain credit for it, they pique themselves upon those qualities of which they are destitute, upon that energy which they have not, those ideas which they are incapable of comprehending, and upon the success which they disdain: these are the guarantees of their political capacity.

It seems a general wish in absolute monarchies, that a sort of mystery should be observed as to the qualities which are adapted to government, in order that a self-importance and cold mediocrity may distance a superior understanding, and declare it incapable of contemplations much more simple than those in which it has been constantly occupied.

In the language adopted by a coalition of certain men, a knowledge of the human heart consists in never being guided, either in our aversions or our preferences, by indignation against vice, or enthusiasm in the cause of virtue; to be versed in the science of business, is to be never influenced in one decision by any generous or philosophical motive. The republic, discussing at large many of its interests, and submitting every thing to the general voice, must enfranchise us from that blind faith which was formerly exacted as to the secrets of the art of government.

Undoubtedly, great talents are necessary for a good administration; but it was in order to banish talents, that people endeavored to inspire a belief that those reflections, which serve to form the profound philosopher, the eminent author, and the eloquent orator, have no connection with the principles by which the chiefs of a nation ought to be guided. The great Chancellor Bacon, Sir William Temple, L'Hopital, &c., were philosophers and men of literature, and have shown themselves to be the first of statesmen.\*

\* The Chancellor Bacon was guilty of the most atrocious

Frederic II., Marcus Aurelius, and indeed the generality of the kings or heroes whose fame has been the boast of their nation, possessed at the same time minds enlightened by philosophy; their learning, and their talents in civil matters, rendered them dear to posterity, and gained them, during life, the obedience of admiration,—that obedience which gives to absolute power the most delightful attribute of free government; the voluntary assent of public opinion.

Certainly there is no career so limited, so confined, as that of literature, if we view it in the light in which it is frequently considered,—as detached from all philosophy, having no aim but to amuse the leisure hours of life and fill up the void of the mind: such an occupation renders us incapable of the least employment that can require positive knowledge, or that obliges us to render our ideas applicable. A boundless vanity is generally the attendant of literature thus humbled and confined: its possessor believes his reason by the value which he attaches to words without ideas, and to ideas without consequences; he is, of all men, the most occupied with himself, and the most ignorant of what interests others. Literature must often assume such a character, when it is cultivated by men removed from all affairs of importance.

The most degrading circumstance to literature was its inutility; that which rendered the maxims of government illiberal, was such an entire disunion of politics and philosophy, that those who had devoted their talents to instruct and enlighten mankind, were immediately judged incapable of governing them. Traces still remain of this absurd prejudice; but they must daily become more faint. Philosophy disqualifies us only for that arbitrary and despotic method of governing, which is degrading to the human species. While we bring the ancient spirit of the court into the new republic, let us not pretend that, in administration, any thing can be more essential than reflection, more certain than reason, or more impressive than virtue.

The object of celebrated writers under a free government is not, as in a monarchy, to give vigor to a state of existence without any fixed aim; but for the important purpose of giving to truth all its persuasive expression, when any material resolution may depend upon some acknowledged axiom. We devote ourselves to the study of philosophy, not as a consolation for the prejudices respecting birth, which, under the ancient government, might debar us from all future prospects, but in order to render ourselves qualified for the magistracies of a country where authority is vested only in the hands of reason.

If military power alone prevailed in any state, and disdained literature and philosophy, mental improvement would take a retrograde course, however great the influence to which it might previously have attained: such a power would unite itself with some dispicable talents calculated to throw a veil over authority, with men who would boast of their pretended powers of reflection in order to abuse them: but reason would be transformed into sophistry, and the mind become cunning and subtle in proportion to the degradation of the character.

The tumult inseparable from a republican government frequently endangers liberty; and if the chiefs do not offer to view the double security of courage and understanding, ignorant power, or perfidious cunning, will sooner or later plunge the government into despotism. To promote the happiness of the human race, it is essential that the great men to whom its destiny is confided should possess, almost in an equal degree, a certain number of apposite qualities; as a superiority in one respect only, is not sufficient to captivate the

*gratitude; and his delicacy in pecuniary matters has been strongly suspected; but here, his talents only are called in question, and not his morality; a distinction which we have but too well learned to make within the last ten years.*

esteem of so many different opinions: neither, if I may thus express myself, does it sufficiently personify the idea which we love to entertain of a celebrated man.

If words have not eloquently instructed us as to the motive of actions, and if actions have not proved the truth of words; memory can retain only an isolated recollection of either words or actions. The soldier without an enlightened mind, or the orator without bravery, cannot captivate the imagination: certain sentiments with us still remain uninfluenced, and our own ideas are still left to decide for ourselves. The ancients felt a passionate admiration for their illustrious chiefs, whose native greatness stamped their characters with divers talents and glory of various kinds. A variety of superior qualities not only elevates him who possesses them; but establishes a greater connection between this extraordinary man and his fellow-creatures. Any one faculty out of proportion to the rest, appears a caprice of nature; whilst a union of many tranquilizes the mind and attracts affection. The moral character of a great man ought to present to our view that organization, that balance, that perfect justice, which alone, either in a character or a government, can give the idea of repose and stability.

But perhaps it will be observed, that in a republic this enthusiasm respecting an individual ought of all things to be feared the most; and far from desiring that perfection of character which I have just said is almost essential, those instruments of success ought rather to be sought, who compile discourses, make decrees, or gain conquests, in the same manner as men exercise an exclusive profession, without having one idea beyond it.

Nothing can be less philosophical, that is to say, nothing can tend less to happiness, than that jealous system which would deprive nations of their rank in history, by levelling the reputation of individuals. General instructions ought to be most assiduously promoted; but in the same level with the interest of the advancement of mental improvement, we must also leave the aim of individual glory. A republic ought to give greater encouragement, than any other government, to the multiplied endeavors which it inspires; a small number only reach the goal, but all join in the race; and although fame rewards nothing but success, every attempt is doubtless of some remote utility.

The love of glory must not be extinguished in great minds, nor the sentiment of admiration in the people: to this sentiment every degree of affection between the governors and the governed owes its existence. Of what benefit is an appreciating and cool judgment in our numerous modern associations? Can millions of men decide upon any thing, each according to his respective understanding? Is it not necessary that a more animated impulse should communicate itself to that multitude whom it is so difficult to unite in one common opinion? If a nation is cold with respect to worth and merit, its contempt will not be regarded; and if some libellous detractors confound in their writings the virtuous man with the guilty, the citizens will no longer feel that emotion of pure affection toward their benefactor, which leads them to repel calumny as a sacrilege.

You cannot attach the people even to the idea of virtue, unless you explain it by the generous actions and the moral character of some particular individuals. Some think more effectually to secure the independence of a people by endeavoring to interest it only by abstract principles; but the multitude comprehend ideas only by events; it displays its justice in hatreds and affections; it will not cease to respect, until it is utterly depraved; and by esteeming its magistrates, it learns to love the government.

The glory of great men is the patrimony of a free country; after their death, it becomes the inheritance of the people at large. The love of our country is

constituted by recollections. How is it possible not to admire, in the eloquence of the ancients, the respectful sentiments which they felt for their illustrious dead ; the homage paid to their memory ; and the examples offered in their names to their successors ? Nature has given animation to all existence ; and would man change that animation for mere abstraction ?

The principle of a republic where political equality is holden as sacred, ought to be the establishment of the most marked distinctions amongst men, according to their talents and their virtues. Free nations ought to have in their tribunals judges inexorably determined to do justice to all, without being laid away either by indignation or enthusiasm ; but when such nations have endured their magistrates with the relentless execution of the laws, they may abandon themselves to the freedom of approbation and censure : they may offer to their great men that reward to which alone they aspire,—the opinion of the present time and that of posterity ; opinion, the sole recompense, the sole illusion, from which even virtue has never the power to detach itself.

And Cæsar, and Cromwell, some one perhaps will ask ; think you that the enthusiasm which they inspired, did not in the end prove fatal to the liberty of their country ?

The enthusiasm inspired by military glory, is the only kind that can become dangerous to liberty ; but even this is unattended by any fatal consequences, except in those countries where divers causes have destroyed the admiration merited by moral qualities or civil state talents. Thus we have seen a republic overthrown at Rome, and in England ; each nation being wearied of granting its esteem by a long continuance of crimes and misfortunes.

Yet let us consider what that power was which struggled singly against Cæsar ? It was neither the political institutions of the Romans, nor their senate, nor their armies ; it was the greatness of one man ; it was the respect which was still universally felt for Cato ; this respect balanced the destiny of Cæsar and Cato, nor could Cæsar feel himself secure in the authority, unless his rival should cease to exist.

Cato exemplified the power of virtue on earth ; and Rome testified for him that admiration which is an honor to the nation that feels it, and which presents to tyranny a far more considerable obstacle than all the confusion of names, actions, and characters. They might endeavor to give to this confusion the name of a philosophical republic ; but, in fact, it would only be combats without victory, disorders without any object in view, and calamities without end.

The reputation and the homage constantly attendant upon men who have gone through an honorable career in public affairs, are amongst the first means of preserving liberty : but what most effectually contributes to the progress of mental improvement is, as was the custom amongst the ancients, to blend together military, legislative, and philosophical pursuits : nothing animates and methodizes intellectual meditations so much as the hope of being immediately useful to the human race. When thought may be the forerunner of action ; when a happy reflection may be instantaneously transformed into a beneficent institution ; how deep an interest must every man feel in communicating the result of his contemplations : he no longer fears that the light of his reason will be extinguished without having in the least contributed to enlighten the path of active life ; he no longer experiences that kind of shame which genius, condemned to pursuits merely speculative, must feel in the presence of the most inferior person, provided that person is vested with a power that may enable him to wipe away a tear, to render a material service, or even to be useful to any individual in existence.

When reflection can efficaciously contribute to the happiness of man, its mission is ennobled and its aim is

more exalted : it is then no longer a melancholy reverie, dwelling upon the calamities incident to human life, without the ability to relieve them ; it is a powerful weapon bestowed by nature, the liberty of using which must give assurance of its triumph.

Conquerors fear even the soldiers who assisted them to gain their empire ; priests fear the very fanaticism on which their power depends ; ambition is suspicious of its own instruments : but enlightened men, who have obtained places of the highest importance in the state, can never cease to value and diffuse knowledge. Reason has nothing to fear from reason, and philosophical minds establish their own power upon their equals.

After having examined the various principles of emulation amongst men, it may be useful to consider what influence women may have over mental improvement. This shall be the subject of the following chapter.

## CHAPTER IV.

### OF FEMALE LITERATURE.

Misfortune resembles the black mountain of Bember, situated at the extremity of the burning kingdom of Lahor : while we ascend it, we see before us only barren rocks ; but no sooner do we reach the summit, than we perceive the heavens over our head, and the kingdom of Cachemire at our feet.

The Indian Cottage : by Bernardine de St. Pierre.

The rank which women hold in society is still, in many respects, indeterminate ; a desire to please draws forth their natural understanding, while reason advises them to remain unknown, and their success is as absolute as their failure.

I cannot but think, that a period will arrive, when philosophical legislators will bestow a serious attention upon the education of women, upon the civil laws by which they are protected, the duties incumbent upon them, and the happiness which may be secured to them : but, in the present state of things, they are placed neither in the order of nature, nor in the order of society ; what some succeed in, proves the destruction of others ; their good qualities are sometimes prejudicial to them, while their faults befriend them : one moment they are everything, the next perhaps they are nothing. Their destiny is, in some respects, similar to that of freed-men in a monarchy ; if they attempt to acquire any ascendancy,—a power which the laws have not given them, it is imputed to them as a crime ; if they remain slaves, they are persecuted and oppressed.

Generally speaking, it would certainly be far better if women would devote themselves wholly to domestic virtues : but a strange caprice in the judgment of men with respect to women is, that they esteem a total inattention to essential duties more pardonable in a female, than the crime of attracting attention by distinguished talents ; even an abasement of the heart is tolerated in favor of an inferior understanding, whilst the most unswerving integrity can scarcely obtain forgiveness for real superiority.

Let us lay open to view the divers causes of this eccentricity. I shall begin by considering what is the fate of literary women in a monarchy, and also what awaits them in a republic. My first object must be to characterize the principal differences which may arise from these two political situations in the destiny of such females as may aspire to literary fame ; and afterwards to consider at large, what degree of happiness those women who pretend to celebrity may reasonably expect from it.

In a monarchy they have ridicule to fear, and in a republic, hatred.

It is to be expected from the nature of things, that in a monarchy where a strict conformity to fashion is

prejudice prevails, every extraordinary action, every attempt to move out of the sphere in which you are placed, must at first appear ridiculous. What is required of you by your situation in life, or by any peculiar circumstances in which you may be placed, meets with general approbation; but inventions that are not necessary, or to which you are not compelled, are even anticipated by the severest censure. The jealousy natural to all men is not to be appeased, unless you apologize, if I may so speak, for your success, by representing it as the result of necessity; but if you will not veil the reputation you have acquired under the pretence of amending your situation in life and promoting your welfare; if, in fact, you are suspected of only wishing to distinguish yourself, you will inevitably become an annoyance to those whose ambition is directed to similar views.

Indeed, men may always disguise their self-love, and their desire of applause, under the mask or the reality of the most energetic and noble passions: but when women take up the pen; as their first motive is generally supposed to be a wish to display their abilities, the public is not easily persuaded to grant them its approbation, and, knowing this approbation to be essential to them, feels still more inclined to withhold it. In every situation of life it may be observed, that no sooner does a man perceive himself to be eminently necessary to you, than his conduct is changed into a cold reserve. Thus it is when a woman publishes any work; she puts herself so entirely in the power of opinion, that the dispensers of that opinion fail not to make her painfully sensible of her dependence.

To these general causes, which are common to all countries, may be added various circumstances peculiar to the French monarchy. A spirit of knight-errantry which still existed, was in some instances an obstacle to the too assiduous cultivation of literature amongst men. This same spirit must also inspire increased disgust towards those women who suffered themselves to be so exclusively engaged by literary pursuits, as to divert their attention from their first interest, the sentiments of the heart. An honorable delicacy may occasion even men to feel some repugnance to submit to all those criticisms which public notice must draw upon them: how much greater reason, therefore, have they to be displeased at seeing those beings whom it is their duty to protect, their wives, their sisters, or their daughters, expose themselves to the public judgment, and boldly render themselves the general topic of conversation!

Great talents, undoubtedly, would triumph over all these objections; but, nevertheless, a woman must find it extremely difficult to carry off with credit to herself the reputation of an authoress; to unite it with the independence of elevated rank, and to lose nothing, in consequence of such reputation, of that dignity, that grace, that ease, and those unaffected manners, which ought to characterize her habitual manner and conduct.

Women are readily allowed to sacrifice their domestic pursuits to fashion and dissipation, but every serious study is treated in them as pedantry; and if they do not from the first rise superior to the pleasantries levelled at them from all sides, those very pleasantries will in the end discourage genius, and check the course of well-grounded confidence and elevation of mind.

Some of these disadvantages will not be met with in any republic, and particularly in that where the general aim is to promote the progress of mental improvement. Perhaps it may be natural to expect that, in such a state, literature, properly so called, may fall entirely to the lot of women; while men devote themselves solely to the higher branches of philosophy.

The education of women has, in all free countries, been adapted to the peculiar constitution established in each: at Sparta they were accustomed to the exercise of war; at Rome, austere and patriotic virtues were

required of them. If, therefore, it is wished that the principal object of the French republic should be emulation in mental improvement and philosophy, it would surely be a rational plan to promote the cultivation of the female mind, in order that men may find companions with whom they may converse on subjects the most interesting to themselves.

Nevertheless, since the revolution, men have thought it politically and morally desirable to reduce the female mind to the most absurd mediocrity: the conversation they have addressed to women, has been in a language as devoid of delicacy as of sense; and consequently the latter have had no inducement to excite the powers of their understanding. We do not, however, find that all this has tended to the improvement of manners. It is not by contracting the sphere of ideas, that the simplicity of the primitive ages can be restored; and the only result of such a system is, that less understanding has produced less delicacy, less respect for public opinion, and fewer means of supporting solitude. What is applicable to every thing that regards the understanding, has in this instance come to pass. It has always been thought, that to enlighten the mind has been productive of evil consequences; to repair which, reason has been made to make a retrograde course: whereas the evil arising from mental improvement can be corrected only by a still farther progress in that very improvement. Either morality is a fable, or the more enlightened we are, the more attached to it we become.

If, indeed, the French could inspire their women with all the virtues of the English women, with their modest manners, and their taste for solitude; they would do well to prefer such qualities to all the shining gifts of shining abilities: but probably all they could obtain from their countrywomen would be, to read nothing and to know nothing; in conversation, to be totally incapable of an interesting idea, a happy expression, or an elegant diction; and, far from being more domesticated by this charming scene of ignorance, their children would become less dear to them in proportion as themselves were less able to superintend their education.

The world would become at once more necessary and more dangerous to them, as love would be the only subject of conversation that could be addressed to them; and this subject could no longer be treated with that sort of delicacy which has hitherto been a substitute for morality.

Many advantages highly important to the morality and happiness of a country would be at once lost, if women should ever be rendered totally insipid or frivolous: they would possess fewer means to soften the irritable passions of men; they would no longer, as formerly, maintain a useful ascendancy over matters of opinion, which they have ever animated in every thing that respects humanity, generosity, and delicacy. Women, only apart from the interests of politics, and the pursuits of ambition, cast an odium upon all base actions, condemn ingratitude, and honor misfortunes when noble sentiments have brought them on. If in France there no longer existed women sufficiently enlightened to have their judgment attended to, and sufficiently dignified in their manners to inspire real respect, the opinion of society would no longer have any influence over the actions of men.

I believe firmly, that in the ancient government, where opinion held so salutary an authority, that authority was the work of women distinguished by their sense and good character; women who were quoted as examples of eloquence, when inspired by some generous resolution, when pleading in the cause of misfortune, or when boldly expressing some sentiment which required the courage to offend against power.

During the course of the revolution, those same women have given the most numerous and convincing proofs of energy and intrepidity. Frenchmen can never become such absolute republicans, as wholly to anni-



hilate the independence and pride natural to the female character. Women had undoubtedly, under the ancient government, too much ascendancy in public affairs; but will they become less dangerous, when destitute of all mental improvement, and consequently of reason? From their influence would then arise an immoderate rage for wealth; preferences without discernment, and affection without delicacy; and instead of ennobling, they would degrade the objects of their attachment. Will the state be a gainer by this? The rarely-experienced danger of finding a woman whose superiority is out of proportion to the lot of her sex in general; ought it to deprive the republic of that celebrity which France enjoyed by the art of pleasing and of living in society? Now, without women, society can be neither agreeable nor interesting; but if they be devoid of sense, or destitute of that grace in conversation which pre-supposes a distinguished and elegant education, such women are a nuisance instead of an ornament to society; they introduce a sort of foolery, a party-spirit of slander, a tiresome insipid gayety, which must eventually banish all sensible men from their meetings; and thus the once brilliant assemblies of Paris would be reduced to young men who have nothing to do, and young women who have nothing to say.

It is true, that inconveniences will arise in all human affairs: some undoubtedly may be found in the superiority of women, and even in that of men, in the self-love of people of understanding, in the ambition of heroes, the imprudence of superior minds, the irritability of independent character, the impetuosity of courage and in many other cases. And must we for these reasons resist with all our power the natural bent of the mind, and direct all our institutions to discourage genius and talents? Indeed it is hardly certain, that such discouragement would be favorable either to domestic or public authority. Those women who are destitute of conversable powers, and unversed in literature, have generally the most art in fleeing from their duty; and unenlightened nations know not how to be free, and therefore perpetually change their governors.

To enlighten, to instruct, to perfect the education of women as well as that of men, of nations as well as that of individuals; such is still the best secret to attain all reasonable ends, all social and political relations which we wish to be founded on a durable basis.

The mental improvement of women can surely become an object of fear only through a delicate concern for their happiness. It is possible, that to enlighten their reason may be to give them an insight into the calamities which so frequently fall to their lot: but the same argument would be equally applicable to the general effect of mental improvement upon the happiness of the human race; and for my part, I entertain not a doubt upon the subject.

If the condition of the female world in the civil order of things is very defective; surely to alleviate their situation and not to degrade their mind, is the object most desirable. Assiduously to call forth female sense and reason, is useful both to mental improvement and the happiness of society; only one serious misfortune can accrue from the cultivated education which they may have received; and this would be, if by chance any should acquire such distinguished talents, an eager desire of fame: but even this chance would not be prejudicial to society at large, as it could affect only that small number of women whom nature might devote to the worst of torments,—an importunate thirst for superiority.

Let us suppose some female existing, who seduced by the celebrity of talents, would ardently endeavor to obtain it: how easy would it be to dissuade her, if she had not already advanced too far, to recede? Let

her only see how formidable is the destiny she was preparing for herself. Look but into social order, some one might say; and you will soon perceive it is armed at all points against a woman who dares aspire to raise herself to a reputation on a level with that of men.

No sooner is a woman pointed out as a distinguished person, than the public is in general prejudiced against her. The vulgar can never judge but after certain rules which may be adhered to without danger. Every thing which is out of the common course of events, is at first displeasing to those who consider the beaten track of life as the protection for mediocrity; even a man of superior talents somewhat startles them: but a woman of shining abilities being a still greater phenomenon, astonishes, and consequently incommodes them much more. Nevertheless, a distinguished man being almost always destined to pursue some important career, his talents may become useful to those very persons who annex but a trifling value to the charms of reflection. A man of genius may become a man of power; and from this consideration the envious and the weak pay court to him; but a woman of talents can only offer them what they feel no interest about,—new ideas or elevated sentiments; the sound of her praise, therefore, only fatigues them.

Fame itself may be even a reproach to a woman; because fame is the reverse of what nature intended for her. Severe virtue condemns celebrity even in what is really praise-worthy in itself, as being in some measure inimical to perfect modesty.

Men of sense, astonished to find rivals amongst the fair sex, can neither judge them with the generosity of an adversary, nor with the indulgence of a protector; and in this new conflict they adhere neither to the laws of honor nor to those of good nature.

If, as the greatest misfortune that could befall her, a woman chanced to acquire remarkable celebrity in a time of political dissension, her influence would be thought boundless, even when she attempted not to exert any; the actions of her friends would be all attributed to her; she would be hated for whatever she loved; and this poor defenceless object would be attacked before those who are really formidable were even thought of.

Nothing gives greater scope to vague conjectures, than the uncertain existence of a woman whose name is celebrated, and whose life has been obscure. If the vanity of one man excites derision; if the abhorred character of another makes him sink under the burden of public contempt; if a man of inferior talents fails of some desired success; all are ready to attribute these events to the invisible agency of female power. The ancients persuaded themselves, that fate had thwarted their designs, when they could not accomplish them; in our days, self-love, in like manner, wishes to attribute its failures to some secret cause, and not to itself; and the supposed influence of celebrated women might in cases of necessity, be a substitute for fatality.

Women have no means of manifesting the truth, nor of explaining the particulars of their life: if any calumny is spread concerning them, the public hears it but their intimate friends alone can judge of the truth. What authentic means can a woman have to prove the falsity of scandalous reports? A calumniated man replies by his actions to an accusing world, and may justly say,

‘Let the tenor of my life speak for me.’

But of what service is such a testimony to a woman? Some private virtues; some good deeds, scarcely known; some sentiments confined to the narrow circle in which she was destined to move; some writings which may render her name celebrated in countries of



which she is not an inhabitant and at a time when, perhaps, she has ceased to exist.

A man may, even in his works, refute the calumnies of which he is become the object : but as to women, to defend themselves is an additional disadvantage, to justify themselves a new alarm. They are conscious of a purity and a delicacy in their nature, which the notice even of the public will tarnish ; sense, talents, an impassioned mind, may induce them to emerge from the cloud in which they ought always to be enveloped ; but they never cease to recur to it with regret as their safest asylum.

Women, however distinguished they may be, tremble at the aspect of malevolence ; and although courageous in adversity, enmity intimidates them : they are exalted by reflection, but weakness and sensibility must ever be the leading features of their character. The generality of those whose superior talents have inspired them with a desire of fame, resemble Herminius clothed in a coat of mail ; the warriors perceive the helmet, the lance, and the dazzling plume ; they expect to meet with equal force ; they begin the onset with violence, and the first wound cuts to the heart.

Injustice may not only destroy female happiness and peace, but it may detach the heart from the first object of its affections ; who knows whether the effects produced by slander may not sometimes obliterate truth from the memory ! Who can tell whether the authors of this calumny, having already embittered life, may not even after death deprive an amiable woman of those regrets which are universally due to her memory !

In this description I have hitherto portrayed only the injustice of men towards any distinguished female :— is not that of her own sex equally to be feared ? Do they not secretly endeavor to awaken the ill-will of men against her ! Will they ever unite, in order to aid, to defend, and support her in her path of difficulty ?

Nor is this all : opinion seems to exempt men from all those attentions usually paid to the sex in all that concerns an individual whose superior abilities are generally allowed ; towards such, men may be ungrateful, deceitful, and ill designing, without being called to account by the public. 'Is she not an extraordinary woman ?' Every thing is comprised in these words : she is left to the strength of her own mind, to struggle as she can with her afflictions. The interest usually inspired by females, the power which is the safeguard of men, all fail her at once : she drags on her isolated existence like the Pariahs of India, amongst all those distinct classes into none of which she can ever be admitted, and who consider her as fit only to live by herself, as an object of curiosity, perhaps of envy, although, in fact, deserving of the utmost commiseration.

## CHAPTER V.

### OF WORKS OF IMAGINATION.

It is easy to point out the defects which are prohibited by the laws of good taste in any literary production ; but it is not equally so to trace out the path which imagination ought in future to follow in order to produce new effects. There are certain methods to attain literary success, the very foundations of which have been destroyed by the revolution. Let us begin by examining what these methods are ; and we shall be naturally led to some information as to the new resources which may yet be discovered.

Works of imagination operate upon the mind in two different ways ; by depicting such scenes as excite mirth, or such as awaken the emotion of the soul. *These emotions spring from those concatenations which are inherent in human nature : gayety is frequently only the result of the various, and sometime whimsical*

relations established in society. The emotions of the soul have then a permanent cause, which experiences but few changes from political events ; whilst gayety is in many respects dependent upon circumstances.

The more we simplify institutions, the more we efface those contrasts from which a philosophical mind can produce striking effects. Voltaire has shown, better than any other author, how many resources pleasantry would be deprived of by a reasonable scheme of politics. Voltaire incessantly contrasts what *ought to be* with what *really was* ; exterior pedantry with internal frivolity, the austerity of religious dogmas with the libertine manners of those who instituted them. In a word, almost all his writings display institutions the reverse of every thing that is rational ; and institutions, moreover, so powerful that the pleasantry which dares attack them has, at least, the merit of being fearless. If such a religion was not sanctioned in such a country, there would be no more wit in ridiculing it, than there would be on an European stage to make a jest of the ceremonies of the Bramins.

The same may be said of the prejudice of rank, and of the disgusting abuses which they may occasion : the inhabitants of a country in which these abuses had no existence, would scarcely think any jests on such a subject worth a smile.

The Americans scarcely perceived the merit of such comic descriptions as alluded only to institutions foreign to their government : they listened, perhaps, to what might be said of them, on account of their connections with Europe ; but their own writers would assuredly not exercise their genius on such subjects ; every pleasantry levelled at irrationality, in civil and political institutions, loses its effect the instant it attains its end, the reformation of social order.

The Greeks made a jest of their magistrates, but not of their institutions. Their poetical religion had an entire hold of their imagination : they were always governed either by an authority of their own choice, or by a tyrant who had reduced them to the most abject slavery. They never were, like the French, in that sort of intermediate situation, which is of all others the most fruitful in animated contrasts.

The French made choice of their national hardships as the objects of their pleasantries : ridiculed by their wit what they idolized by their ceremonies ; affected to appear indifferent to their most important interests ; and consented to tolerate even despotism, provided they might make a jest of themselves for having endured it.

The Greek philosophers did not, like the philosophers of monarchical governments, set themselves up in opposition to the institutions of their country ; they had no idea of those hereditary rights which have, generally speaking, been the foundation of power amongst the modern nations since their invasion from the north. The authority of the magistrates, in Greece, owed its strength to the consent of the nation itself ; consequently, nothing could have appeared more inconsistent than the endeavor to throw ridicule upon a political order which was entirely dependent upon the public will. Moreover, a free people attaches too much importance to the institutions by which they are governed to abandon them to the chance of thoughtless ridicule.

If the constitution of France be free and its institutions philosophical ; pleasantries upon the government being no longer of any ability, will cease to create any interest ; even those which are levelled against the human race, as we see them in the 'Candid' of Voltaire, are not applicable, in many respects, under a republican government.

When despotism exists, the poor slaves must be consoled by a belief that the general lot of all mankind is unhappy ; but that elevation of mind essential to republican liberty, ought to inspire a disgust towards

every thing that tends to degrade human nature. A disgraceful life does not animate fortitude; the thing most important is, to place the enjoyments of virtue above those of life, and to dignify all the sentiments of the heart in order still more to ennoble that first of sentiments, a love of goodness and of our fellow-creatures.

The great secret of pleasantry is, in general, to check all enthusiasm; fearlessly to attack every thing, and to weaken passion by indifference. This secret is of material use in opposing pride and prejudice; but liberty and patriotic virtue must be maintained by an active interest in the happiness and glory of the nation; and the vivacity of this sentiment is destroyed, if distinguished men are led so to condemn all human things, that they are alike indifferent to good and evil.

When society advances progressively in the path of reason, nothing can be so wrong as to dishearten; and pleasantries which, after having been useful in weakening the power of prejudice, could no longer act, unless to diminish the influence of truth;—such pleasantries, I repeat, would undermine the principles of moral existence which ought to be the support of individuals and of mankind at large. Thus 'Candid' and all other writings of the same kind, which indulge their satirical philosophy even to make a jest of the importance attached to the most noble interests of life, are hurtful in a republic, where it is necessary to esteem our equals, to confide in the good we may be able to do, and to animate our minds to make daily sacrifices by the religion of hope.

In works of invention there may certainly be another kind of gaiety than that which depends almost entirely on pleasantries upon social order, or upon the lot of humanity: this is a penetrating and delicate observation of the passions and characters. The genius of Moliere presents the most sublime model of this superior talent. Voltaire was unable to produce any theatrical effect from pleasantry of this description, notwithstanding the habitual address and ingenuity of his mind.

It yet remains for us to examine what subjects of comedy may be most successful under a free government.

There are two distinct kinds of ridicule amongst mankind: that which is borrowed from nature; and that which is diversified according to the different modifications of society. This latter kind of ridicule must be almost without support in a country where political equality is established, where the relations of society are more nearly allied to those of nature, and a conformity to them may exist without offence to reason. A man might be possessed of very great merit under the ancient government, and yet have rendered himself very ridiculous by an absolute ignorance of established customs; whereas, in a free state, the habits of society can be shocked only by real defects in the head or the heart.

During the monarchy, it was frequently necessary to conciliate the jarring claims of dignity and interest, of external courage and imperceptible flattery, an air of indifference and a constant attention to self-advancement, the reality of slavery and an affectation of independence. So many difficulties to surmount, might readily attach ridicule to him who knew not how to steer clear of them. Greater simplicity, with respect to manners and situations in life, would furnish authors under a republic, with fewer subjects for comedy.

Amongst the productions of Moliere, there are some which are founded entirely upon established prejudices; such as 'Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme,' 'George Dandin,' &c.: but there are also some, such as 'l'Avare,' 'Le Tartuffe,' &c., which describe man as he is in all countries and at all periods. Such pieces as these could suit a free government, if not in every point of their character, yet at least when the whole is taken together.

The ridicule that attacks the vices of the human heart, is more striking and more bitter than that which describes mere absurdities or whimsical institutions. We feel something like melancholy even in the most comic scenes of 'the Tartuffe': because they bring natural depravity to view. But when pleasantry merely sets before us the contradictions arising from certain prejudices, or perhaps the prejudices themselves; the hope we always entertain of correcting them, diffuses a more lively gaiety over the impression caused by ridicule. We can neither have a talent, nor indeed any occasion, for that sort of light gaiety, in a government founded upon reason, where the mind ought rather to be turned towards the highest department of comedy,—the most philosophical of all the works of imagination, and that which pre-supposes the most profound and extensive knowledge of the human heart. The republic may excite a new emulation in this career.

In a monarchy, we take pleasure in ridiculing such manners as do not accord with received customs; in a republic, the proper objects of ridicule are those vices of the heart which may be detrimental to the public good. It may not be amiss to quote a remarkable example of the new subjects which comedy may treat of, and of the new aim which it may have in view.

In the 'Misanthrope' of Moliere, Philinte appears the reasonable man, and we laugh at the absurdities of Alceste. A modern author, developing these two characters in their progress in life, has shown Alceste to be generous and enthusiastic in friendship, and Philinte to be secretly avaricious and selfish, even to tyranny. This author has, I think, in his productions, taken the exact point of view in which comedy should henceforth be presented: those vices which arise from the absence of virtuous qualities, negative vices, if I may so call them, are what the stage ought now to attack: it ought to expose those mere exteriors, under the shelter of which so many men set their consciences at ease, and indulge themselves in wickedness under the semblance of decency.

A spirit of republicanism requires positive and acknowledged virtues. Many vicious men have no other ambition than to escape ridicule: they ought to know, and indeed it is necessary to possess sufficient talents to prove to them, that successful vice affords a wider field for ridicule, than uncouth virtue.

For some time past it has been the fashion to give the name of *firminess of mind* to that perseverance which will pursue its interest in defiance to all its duties; and to call him a *man of sense*, who breaks successively, but with art, every tie, however solemn, that he has formed. Virtue, in short, is represented as a hypocrite; and vice passes for the noble assurance of superior talents. It ought, therefore, to be the aim of comedy, to make men feel that immorality is a proof of narrowness of mind; to wound the self-love of the depraved amongst mankind; and to give a new direction to the shafts of ridicule. Formerly it was the foible of men to take pleasure in representing certain defects as even graceful, and every estimable quality as insipid; whereas, in the present day, it is desirable to devote our talents to re-establish every thing according to the true meaning of nature; to exhibit stupidity and vice; and to show the near relationship between genius and virtue.

But, it may be asked, what is become of our contrasts; and how shall we produce effects? Assuredly, some very unexpected ones will arise from this proposed alteration: for example, the immoral conduct of men towards the softer sex has been unceasingly represented on the stage with a view to cast a ridicule upon deluded women. The confidence which women too generally feel in the sentiments they inspire, may reasonably afford a subject for raillery; but the subject would be more worthily treated, and would also afford a greater scope for talents, if the deceiver himself was

rendered the object of that satire, which would be better directed against the aggressor than the injured. It is easy to censure gravely what is culpable in itself; but the difficulty is, dexterously to place the fool's cap and bells upon the head of the guilty; and even this is very possible.

Those men who would impose their crimes and vices upon you as additional graces, and whose desire to be thought clever is such, that they would boast even to yourself of having dexterously betrayed you, if they did not think that it would sooner or later come to your knowledge; men who would conceal their incapacity by their villainy, flattering themselves that a spirit so daring against universal morality will not be suspected of imbecility in its political conceptions;—these minds, so careless of the opinion of the good, and so anxious to obtain the favor of the powerful; these retailers of vice, who carp at elevated principles, and trifle with sensibility, ought themselves to become the victims of that ridicule which they prepare for others; the mask should be torn off, and they should be made the laughing stock of children. To direct against such characters, the energetic power of indignation is, in fact, to do nothing; they must be deprived of that reputation for address and insolence, upon which they pride themselves, as a compensation for the loss of esteem.

In countries where the political institutions are rational, ridicule ought to assume the province of contempt. Vice, however elegant, circumspect, or dexterous, ought nevertheless to be abandoned to the sarcasms of ridicule,—the sole avenger that dares attack successful vice; the sole weapon that has yet the power to wound, where shame and remorse are ineffectual.

The morality of the French is perverted by the ardent desire they feel to distinguish themselves in any way; but most by the brilliancy of their wit. When the qualities they already possess are insufficient for this purpose, they have recourse to vice in order to render themselves conspicuous: this gives them that confident address, that assurance and firmness, at least against the misfortunes of others, which may occasion some illusion. Comedy ought to oppose this detestable disposition of mind, by disappointing it of its object. Indignation attacks vice as a formidable power; comedy ought to represent it as a contemptible weakness arising from a wretched degradation of the mind.

The literature of free countries, as I have already observed, has very rarely turned upon good comedy: the facility of obtaining success by allusions to the existing circumstances of the day, and the serious concerns of important political interests, have by turns been equally prejudicial, in various nations, to the art of comedy. But in France, the power of self-love is still in such full vigor, that it will furnish for a long time to come many pleasant subjects for comedy. Horace has described the just man standing firm and erect upon the ruins of the world: it is the same with the opinion which a Frenchman entertains of himself: this survives, unmolested, all the faults that he commits, and becomes superior to all the revolutions of fortune with which it is encompassed. While this feature of the French character remains uneffaced among them, their comic authors will always have some interesting subject to treat upon, and ridicule will have as much influence in the progress of philosophy, as reason and sentiment.

Those affections which never very properly come under the department of tragedy; whose descriptions being chiefly of the pathetic kind, the source of its effects are inexhaustible. Nevertheless, like all other productions of the human mind, it is modified by social institutions and the customs dependent on them.

*The subjects of the ancients and their imitators, produce less effect in a republic than in a monarchy: the distinctions of rank rendered the pains of misfor-*

tune still more acute: they placed between it and the throne an immense interval which imagination could not clear without trembling. Social order, which amongst the ancients created slaves, rendered still deeper the abyss of misery, gave greater elevation to fortune, and rendered the various lots of human destiny truly theatrical. It certainly is possible to feel an interest in situations which have no parallel in our own country; but, nevertheless, the philosophical spirit which ought at length to result from free institutions and political equality diminishes every day the power of social illusions.

Royalty had been often banished, often annihilated in the governments of the ancients: but in our days it has been analyzed: and this at once destroys the effects of imagination. The splendor of power, the respect which it inspires, the pity which we feel for those who lose it, when we believe they are entitled to possess it; all these sentiments act upon the mind, independent of the talents of the author; and their effect would be very much weakened in the political order which I am now supposing. Already man has suffered too much as *man* only, to feel much additional emotion for the misfortunes, and other circumstances which are peculiar to the destiny of those individuals who are possessed of dignity and power.

Nevertheless, tragedy must not be converted into a drama: and in order effectually to avoid a fault of this nature, we ought carefully to study the difference of these two styles of writing. This difference, perhaps, does not consist merely in the rank of the personage represented, but in the grandeur of the characters, and the energy of the passions when properly described.

Many attempts have been made to introduce on the French stage the beauties of the English genius, and the effects of the German theatre; but with the exception of a very small number,\* these attempts have obtained success only for the moment, and no lasting reputation; and for this evident reason, that the emotion produced by tragedy, like the laughter excited by comedy is only a passing impression. If the cause of this impression has not awakened in you one new idea; if the tragedy at which you have shed tears, has left in your mind neither the remembrance of one moral observation, nor of any novelty of situation, drawn from the impulses of the passions; the emotion which it has excited in you is a pleasure more innocent certainly than that excited by the combats of gladiators, but equally unimproving to reflection and sentiment.

I have met with an observation in some German work, which appears to me perfectly just: it is, that tragedy, when really good, ought to strengthen the mind after having weakened it. And indeed, true greatness of character, however heavy the calamities under which it is represented, generally inspires the spectators with an enthusiastic admiration, which renders them more capable of enduring misfortune.

A principle of utility is found in this style, as well as in all others. What is truly great, improves the man; and without studying the rules of taste, if we feel that any theatrical production acts upon the character in any manner that can make it better, we may rest assured that it contains some marks of true genius.

It is not any maxim of morality, it is the development of characters, and the combination of natural events, which produce this effect upon the stage: and by taking this rule as a guide, we may judge what foreign productions we may add to our own store.

\* Duclès, in some scenes of all his productions; Chénier, in his fourth act of 'Charles IX.'; Arnault, in the fifth act of the 'Vénitiens,' have introduced upon the French stage a new and remarkable sort of effect, which belongs more to the genius of the northern poets than to that of the French.

It is not enough to affect the heart ; we must enlighten the mind : and all that stage-scenery which strikes the eyes only, such as tombs, executions, spectacles, combats, &c., ought merely to be permitted as directly conducive to the portraying of some exalted character, or some profound sentiment ; all the affections of a reflecting mind have a rational object in view. An author merits real fame only when he makes the power of emotion subservient to some great moral truths.

The circumstances of private life suffice for the effect of the drama ; whilst in general, it is necessary that the interest of nations should be included in the events that can be worthy to become the subjects of tragedy. Nevertheless, it is in lofty ideas and profound sentiments, rather than in historical remembrances and illusions, that we must seek for the dignity of tragedy.

Vauvenargue has observed, that 'sublime thoughts proceed from the heart.' Tragedy is an exemplification of this exalted truth. Fenelon has composed a piece founded upon a fact which is entirely within the province of the drama. The very name of M. de Malesherbes, his noble, but dreadful destiny, would, with a serious nation, be a subject for the most affecting tragedy in the world. Exalted virtue and extensive genius are the new dignities which ought to characterize tragedy, and, above all, the sentiments arising from misfortune ; such as, in our days, we have learned to experience.

I am entirely of opinion, that the moral nature is more energetic in its expressions, than our French tragedies, in all other respects admirable, have described it. The splendor derived from exalted rank, introduces into tragical subjects a sort of respect which prevents the characters from meeting on equal terms : this respect sometimes occasions a cold manner of characterizing the emotions of the soul. Expressions veiled, sentiments restrained, and proceedings always cautious, require great talents in this peculiar style ; but the passions cannot, through all these difficulties, be represented with that heart-rending energy, that deep penetration, which complete independence must inspire.

Under a republican government, the reflection must be most deeply affected by virtue ; while the imagination will be powerfully influenced by misfortune. I know not whether even glory, the only pomp of life which can be holden in any estimation by the philosophical mind, would effect a republican spectator so deeply, as the representation of those emotions which correspond with our inmost feelings, by their analogy to human nature.

That spirit of philosophy which generalizes our ideas, together with the system of political equality, must give a new character to our tragedies. This indeed is no reason why historical subjects should be rejected ; but great men ought to be portrayed with such sentiments as may awaken in their favor the sympathy of every heart, and set off obscure facts by dignity of character :—our nature ought to be ennobled instead of aiming at perfection in ideas of mere conformity. It is not the irregularity and the inconclusiveness of the English and German productions that ought to be the object of our imitation ; but it would be a new kind of beauty in the French theatres, as well as in those of many other nations, could they learn the art of giving dignity to common circumstances, and to paint with simplicity events of the greatest importance.

The stage is real life, exalted perhaps, but still it ought to be real life : and if the most common circumstance can serve as a contrast to great effects, we must know how to introduce it with propriety, in order to enlarge the boundaries of the art without giving offence to taste. In the style of the ideal beautiful, the first-rate tragedians of the French can never be equalled

an attempt therefore must be made, under the guidance of reason and talents, to introduce more frequently those dramatic arts which awaken and recall individual recollections : for nothing can excite such deep emotions as these.\*

Conformity on the stage is inseparable from aristocracy in the government ; one cannot be supported without the other. The dramatic art, deprived of all these factitious resources, cannot improve by any means but those of philosophy and sensibility ; but, with these aids, it becomes unlimited ; for grief is one of the most powerful methods of developing the human mind.

Life glides away, as it were, unperceived by the happy ; but in affliction, reflection enlarges itself to search for some hope, or to discover a motive for regret ; it examines the past, and tries to drive into the future ; and this faculty of observation, which, when the mind is at ease, turns entirely upon exterior objects, in misfortune is exercised only upon the impressions we feel. The ceaseless operation of uneasiness upon the mind causes in the heart a fluctuation of ideas and sentiments, which agitate our internal feelings, as if every moment were teeming with some new event. What an inexhaustible source of reflection does this afford to genius.

The rules of the tragic art are not of themselves such impediments to the subjects we may choose, as are the difficulties attached to the exigencies of poetry. What would be very sensible and true in common language, may be even ridiculous in verse : the metre, the harmony, and the rhyme, interdict expressions which, in such a given situation, might produce a fine effect. The conformities of the theatre are required by the dignity of the moral nature ; poetical conformity depends upon the mere act of versification ; and although it may often heighten the impression made by some peculiar style of beauty, it limits the bold career which genius, with a knowledge of the human heart, might otherwise fearlessly engage in.

And in fact, we should not think much of the grief of any one who could express in verse his regret for the loss of some friend whom he had sincerely loved. A certain degree of grief inspires a turn for poetry ; one degree more destroys it. There is, therefore, undoubtedly, a severity of distress, a style of truth, the effect of which would be weakened by being expressed in poetry : there are also common circumstances in life that may be rendered terrible by the power of affliction ; but these cannot be versified and clothed in all the imagery which versification requires, without introducing ideas altogether foreign to the natural chain of sentiments. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that a tragedy in prose, however eloquent its language, would in France excite much less admiration than the capital pieces in verse. The merit of a difficulty overcome, and the charm of an harmonious rhyme, served at once to display the double merit of the poet and the dramatic author. The union of these two talents has been one of the principal causes of the great difference existing between the French and English tragedy.

\* A French audience is not generally willing to encourage any innovation in the theatrical line : justly admiring the masterpieces already in its possession, any deviation from the path which Racine has pointed out, appears to be prejudicial to the art. I do not however believe, that it is impossible to succeed in a new track, if some effects not yet hazarded upon the stage were introduced with great caution and superior talents ; but if we would wish this enterprise to succeed, it must be conducted by the most rigid and critical taste. A general knowledge of the precepts of literature will be sufficient for us, if we submit to received rules ; but if we wish to triumph over the repugnance which a French audience naturally feel towards the English or German style, as they call it, we ought scrupulously to watch over even the lightest shades which the most delicate taste could reproach. We should be bold in our conceptions, but cautious in the execution of them ; and in this respect follow the literature, a principle which equally holds good in politics : the more hazardous the project altogether, the more cautious, and even timorous we ought to be in the execution of each separate part.

The inferior characters of Shakspeare speak in prose ; his scenes of transition are in prose ; and even when he does make use of verse, that verse being generally without rhyme, does not require, as in the French language, an almost continual poetic splendor. I do not, however, recommend these prose tragedies to the imitation of France, where the ear could hardly be reconciled to them ; but the art of simple and natural versification ought to be brought to such perfection, that it may not, even by poetical beauties, divert the audience from those sentiments of emotion which ought to absorb every other idea. In a word, if we would open a new source of theatrical effects, we must find some intermediate style between the strict conformity of the French poets, and the defective taste of the northern writers.

Philosophy extends itself over all the arts of imagination, as well as over all the works of reason ; and man, in this enlightened age, has no longer any curiosity but that which respects the passions of human nature. Every thing external is known and considered : the moral being, in his interior sentiments, remains the sole object of wonder, and can alone excite any deep emotion. The style of tragedy most affecting to the human heart, is neither that which retraces the customary ideas of common life, nor that which portrays characters and events as much out of nature as the marvelous in a fairy tale ; it is that style alone which awakens in the mind of man the purest sentiment he has ever experienced, and recalls the feelings of an audience to the noblest emotions of their past life.

Poetry of the imagination will make no farther progress in France ; verse will be filled with philosophical ideas, or passionate sentiments ; but the human mind is so enlightened in this century, that it can no longer admit the illusions, nor the enthusiasm, which create such pictures and tales as are calculated to strike the imagination. France, indeed, has never excelled in this style of composition ; and in the present times, the effect of poetry cannot be heightened but by expressing, in the eloquent language of the French, the new observations with which time may have enriched them.

To make use of the mythology of the ancients in these days, would be indeed to become childish through old age ; the poet may indulge himself in all the creations arising from a temporary delirium ; but still we must confide in the sincerity of his feelings. Now mythology is to a modern neither an invention nor a sentiment : he must search his memory for what the ancients found in their habitual impressions. These poetical forms borrowed from paganism, are, to us, only the imitation of an imitation : to use them is, indeed, to portray nature through the medium of the effect which it has produced upon other men.

When the ancients personified love and beauty ; far from weakening the idea which might be conceived of them, they gave strength to that idea, and adapted it to the capacities of men who had but a confused idea of their own sensations. But the moderns have traced every emotion of the mind with such accuracy, that they need only know how to describe them, to be at once eloquent and energetic ; and if they adopted fictions anterior to this profound knowledge of nature and of man, their representations would become devoid at once of energy, gradation, and truth.

In the works even of the ancients how much do we prefer their observations upon the human heart to all the brilliancy of their most splendid fictions ! The image of love, borrowing the features of Ascanius to awaken the passions of Dido, is surely less descriptive of the origin of an impassioned sentiment, than those fine verses expressive of the affections and emotions which nature has implanted in the hearts of all.

*The ancients being incessantly reminded by every surrounding object, of the gods of paganism, the remembrance and the image of them were blended in all*

their impressions : but when the moderns imitate the ancients in this particular, we cannot be ignorant that they have sought in books for resources to embellish those subjects to which sentiment alone would have given sufficient animation. It is always easy to distinguish a labored style, however dexterously an author may seek to conceal it ; and we are no longer seduced by that involuntary talent, if I may so express myself, which feels an emotion instead of seeking it, and abandons itself to its impressions instead of selecting the best method of producing effects. The true objects of the poetical style ought to be, to excite, by images at once novel and just, an interest in mankind to gain a knowledge of those ideas and sentiments which they unconsciously experience : poetry ought to proceed, like every thing else which is the result of reflection, in the philosophical steps of its day.

The models of antiquity ought to be studied with a view to create and animate our taste and love of simplicity ; but not in order to fill modern productions with the ideas and fictions of the ancients : we may attempt to mingle invention with mythological imagery, but they will never coincide. To whatever perfection we may carry our study of the works of the ancients, we can only imitate them, but we are unable to create new fictions in their style. If we wish to equal them, we must not exactly follow their steps : they have gathered in the harvest from their fields,—we had better reap our own.

The few mythological ideas we find in the northern poets, are more analogous to French poetry ; because they are more compatible, as I have endeavored to prove, with philosophical notions. Imagination, in the present century, cannot be assisted by illusion ; it may indeed give exaltation to sentiments founded on fact ; but it is necessary that reason should always approve and comprehend what enthusiasm renders charming.\*

A new style of poetical composition exists in the prose works of Rousseau and Bernardine de St. Pierre : this arises from the observation of nature, in its relations to the sentiments with which it inspires man. The ancients, in personifying flowers, rivers, and trees, had lost sight of simple and natural sensations, and adopted in their stead brilliant chimeras : but Providence has so closely connected physical objects with the moral existence of man, that nothing can be added to the study of the one, which does not at the same time lead to a farther knowledge of the other.

We cannot but call to mind the roaring of the billows, the gloom of the atmosphere, and the terrified inhabitants of the air, in the recital of the deep emotions which filled the souls of Julia and St. Preux, when upon the lake which they were crossing together, *'their hearts beat in unison for the last time.'*

The fertility of the Isle of France, that quick and multiplied vegetation prevailing within the tropics, those tremendous tempests which suddenly succeed to days of cloudless calm, are all connected in our imagination with the return of Paul and Virginia ; who, full of youth, of hope, and love, guided by their faithful negro, confidently look forward to a life of happiness in each other's company, while the unseen tempest is gathering over their heads, which shortly after is to overwhelm them.

As soon as we banish the marvelous, we find a connection throughout all nature ; and our writings ought to imitate its consistency and general appearance. Philosophy, by still more generalizing the ideas, adds grandeur to poetical imagery. A knowledge of logic gives to passion a greater facility of speech. A constant progression of ideas, an aim at utility, ought to be perceived in all works of imagination. We allow no relative merit, nor can we even feel an interest in difficulties overcome, when the mind acquires nothing from

\* De Lille, St. Lambert, and Fontanes, the best French poets in the descriptive style, have already approached very near to the character of the English poets.

them. Human nature must either be analyzed or improved. Romances, poetry, dramatic productions, and all those writings which appear to have no other object than to amuse, cannot attain even to that without some philosophical tendency. Romances, containing nothing but wonderful events, would be soon thrown aside.\* Poetry also which had nothing to boast but fiction, verse whose harmony was its only merit, must soon become wearisome to the mind, which is most desirous of such discoveries as may lay open to view the sentiments and characters of mankind.

The uncontrollable passions excited by civil commotions, annihilate all curiosity, except that which is awakened by those writings which penetrate into the thoughts and sentiments of man, or which serve to acquaint us with the power and the bent of the multitude. We are curious respecting those works only, which portray characters, and put them in action, in some shape or other; and we admire only such writings as may show the influence of exalted sentiment over the heart.

The celebrated German metaphysician, Kant, in his search into the cause of the pleasure arising from eloquence, from the fine arts, and all the finest works of imagination, says, that this pleasure arises from the desire we feel to place at a greater distance the limits of human destiny: those limits which painfully contract the heart, are forgotten for a while in a vague emotion, or an elevated sentiment; the soul delights in the indescribable sensation it feels from whatever is exalted and sublime, and the narrow bounds of earth disappear, when the glorious career of genius and virtue is opened to our view. Indeed, a man of superior mind and feelings submits with difficulty to the shackles of life, and is glad to solace his melancholy imagination by momentary visions of eternity.

A disgust to life, when it does not lead to despair, but simply produces an indifference to the things of this world; such a disgust, together with a love of glory, may inspire great beauty of sentiment; every thing is viewed, as it were, from an eminence, and every object appears in a new strength of coloring. The ancients were better poets in proportion as their imagination was more captivated: amongst the moderns, the imagination ought to be as free from the illusions of hope, as reason itself; for it is thus only that a philosophical imagination can produce striking effects.

Even when surrounded by pictures of prosperity, some appeal to the sentiments of the heart should awaken us to the pensive turn of the poet. At the period in which we live, melancholy is the genuine inspiration of true genius: whoever is not conscious of this affection of the mind, must not aspire to any great celebrity as an author; for this is the price at which such celebrity must be purchased.

Indeed, even in the most corrupt age of the world, considering morality only in its relation to literature, it may be with truth asserted, that works of imagination

\* The romances which have of late been given to the public, in which the aim is to excite terror by descriptions of impenetrable darkness, ancient castles, long corridors, and blasts of wind, are amongst the most useless of all productions, and consequently are in the end more fatiguing to the mind than any others. They are a species of fairy-tales; more monotonous indeed than the genuine ones, because they admit of fewer combinations. But those romances which are descriptive of manners and characters, are frequently the means of conveying more knowledge respecting the human heart, than history itself. In works of this kind, under the mask of invention, we are told many things which we should never learn from history. Female writers in the present day, both in France and in England have excelled in the style of romance; because women study with care, and characterize with skill the emotions of the heart. Moreover, romances have hitherto been dedicated solely to portraying the passion of love, with the delicate shades of which women alone are acquainted. Amongst the modern French romances written by female authors, we ought to distinguish with particular notice, Caliste, Claire d'Albe, Adele de Senanges, and especially the works of Madame de Genlis, whose skill in describing scenery and observation in sentiment render her deserving of a high rank amongst good authors.

tion will not produce any great effect, unless they tend to the honor and exaltation of virtue.

We have attained to a period in which the character of the people resembles, in some respects, that which prevailed at the time of the fall of the Roman empire, and the invasion from the north. At that momentous epoch, the human race seemed to stand in need of enthusiasm and austerity. The more depraved the manners of France are in the present day, the nearer the French approach to a disgust at vice, and the more their feelings are irritated against the endless calamities arising from immortality: the restlessness which at present torments them, will terminate in an animated and decided sentiment of which able writers ought to avail themselves beforehand. The period of a return to virtue is not far distant; and the heart already pants after uprightness, although reason may not at present have insured its triumph.

If we would succeed in works of imagination, we must offer a mild morality in the midst of rigid manners: but when the manners are corrupt, we must constantly hold up to view an austere morality. This general maxim may be more particularly applied to the age in which we live.

So long as the imagination of a people is inclined to fiction, every distant idea is confounded and lost in the whimsical flights of a creative reverie, but when all the power which is left to imagination, consists in the art of giving animation to moral and philosophical truths by sentiments and descriptions; what can be drawn from such truths, that can be adapted to high-flown poetry? One boundless thought, one enthusiastic sentiment which will stand the test of reason, the love of virtue, that inexhaustible source of all good, can at once bring to perfection every art, and every production of the mind; can unite in the same subject, and in the same work, the pleasures of imagination, and the approbation of reason.

## CHAPTER VI.

### OF PHILOSOPHY.

We must not be weary of repeating, that philosophy ought to be considered only as a search into truth by the guidance of reason; and viewed in this light, which is the true one conveyed by the primitive sense of the word, philosophy can be opposed only by those who admit of contradictions in ideas, or supernatural causes in events. It may be justly observed, that there are but two methods of supporting our arguments upon external objects—philosophy, or miracles. Now, in our days, as we do not flatter ourselves that we shall be enlightened by miracles; what is there we can substitute for philosophy? Reason, perhaps, will be the answer. But philosophy itself is nothing but reason generalized. We are clever enough to raise a dispute about two similar propositions; and we believe that we have two distinct ideas, because, by making use of equivocal terms, objects appear double.

Religious ideas are not at variance with philosophy, because they record with reason; neither can it be contrary to philosophy to maintain those principles which are the basis of social order; since those very principles are at unity with reason: but the partisans of prejudice, that is to say, of unjust claims, superstitious doctrines, and oppressive privileges, endeavor to excite an apparent opposition between reason and philosophy, in order that they may be enabled to support their assertion, that arguments may exist, which proscribe the investigation of reason; truths which must be credited unsearched; principles which we

compelled to admit, but must not analyze ; in a word, a sort of exercise of the reflection which can serve only to convince us of its own inutilty. For my own part, I confess, I shall never be able to comprehend by what operation of the mind we can attain the art of giving one half of our faculties the right of prohibiting the use of the other half. If moral organization could be aptly portrayed by sensible objects, I should think it would be by representing a man exerting his best endeavors under the guidance of all the powers of his mind and judgment, rather than by the image of a being who should be laboring with one hand to fetter the other. Providence surely has not given us any moral perception, of which we are forbidden the use ; the more the mind is enlightened, the farther it will penetrate into the essence of things ; at least, if we suffer our mental powers to be directed by a method which can connect and guide them. This method is in itself no more than the result of the most extensive human knowledge and reflection : it is to the study of physical science that we owe that justness of discussion and analysis which gives us a certainty of attaining truth when we sincerely deserve it : it is, therefore, by applying as much as possible the philosophy of positive sciences to the philosophy of intellectual ideas, that we may be enabled to make a useful progress in that moral and political career, where passion incessantly obstructs the path.

In the sciences, and particularly in mathematics, France can boast of the greatest men in Europe. The civil commotions amongst the French, far from discouraging emulation in this line, have inspired a wish to take refuge in the study of it. Inestimable advantage of the present period ! Although every moral idea be absorbed in the disorders of intestine tumult, there yet remain some truths, whose nature is immutable, and whose paths are known. Men of reflection, disgusted on all sides by the follies of party-spirit, attach themselves to these studies : and as the power of reason is always the same, to whatever object it may be applied ; the human mind, which would undoubtedly degenerate, had it no other food than the alteration of factions, exercises itself upon the accurate sciences, until it regains an opportunity of exerting the powers of reflection upon those subjects which are connected with the glory and happiness of society.

Errors of every kind, whether in politics or morals, must shortly be dissipated by that prodigious assemblage of knowledge and discoveries which has enlightened every subject within the limits of physical order : all superstitions, prejudices, false conclusions, and inapplicable principles, will sink into annihilation in the presence of that calm yet decisive reason, which does not concern itself, it is true, in the interests of the moral world, but which teaches all mankind the most efficacious method of proceeding in their researches into truth.

An examination into the actual state of mental improvement, will easily prove to us that the sciences are the only true riches. I have endeavored to show how much the general taste, with respect to literature, must have been changed in France : it is the same with politics ; the course of *ideas* having been rapidly surpassed by that of *events*, those ideas must become proportionally retrograde. This is a natural effect of those precipitated institutions which are not the result of good instruction, and consequently not according to the general wish.

If the imagination, impressed with a just horror at the crimes which the French have been witnesses of, should attribute them to any abstract causes ; it will become inveterate against principles as well as individuals ; and this inveteracy, of which a principle perhaps is the object, will extend itself to every current which flows from it, how distant soever from the source. Did we thus estimate the present state of mental ac-

quirements, we should think the human mind had gone back more than a century within the last ten years : but the nature of those arguments which we allege in favor even of our prejudices, is an incontestable proof of the progress which reason has made amongst us.

In order to justify the various kinds of subervieny towards which divers sentiments may lead, we have recourse, at least, to general ideas ; to motives drawn from the happiness of nations, and arguments founded upon the wishes of the people. When the mind has once taken this bent ; whether it momentarily advances or retreats, its future improving progress is secure ; it can analyze, and therefore cannot long defend what is really erroneous. At the present period, the French have not acquired a perfect acquaintance with political and moral truths ; but almost all parties, however opposite to each other, acknowledge *reason* as the basis of their discussions, and *public utility* as the only right and sole aim of social institutions.

When this generation which has suffered so many cruelties, shall give place to a generation that will not seek to be revenged on mankind for their ideas, it is impossible but that the human understanding should commence a philosophical career. Let us consider this career in its proper point of view, that is, as the only hope and support of the mind, ready to be precipitated into the gulf of despair, by a painful contemplation of the past.

The philosophy of the ancients had in it more imagination, but was less methodical than that of the moderns ; it was also much less susceptible of a certain and positive progress ; and while it made a more lively impression upon the mind, it was more apt to lead it astray by the spirit of system.

A chain of principles had not yet been established by means of analysis, from the origin of metaphysical ideas to their indefinite term. Locke and Condillac had much less imagination than Plato ; but they followed the tract of geometrical demonstration ; and that method alone can present a regular and unbounded progress.

In speaking of *style*, I shall examine whether it be not possible, if not even necessary, that an union should subsist betwixt what strikes the imagination and what acts upon the judgment : but at present I shall only consider the possible applications and advantages that may result from philosophy as a science.

Descartes discovered a method of solving the problems of geometry by algebra. But if, in the calculation of probabilities, we might one day discover a method suitable to objects wholly moral, what an immense step it would be in the career of reason !

A mathematical method has already been applied with success to the metaphysics of the human understanding : and it is a great triumph for philosophy, that the forms of demonstration have been employed to explain the theory of intellectual faculties. For example, what repose and happiness would it not procure to the human species, if political questions could arrive to that degree of evidence and clearness, that the majority of men might give their assent as to a calculated truth !

Without doubt, it would be very difficult to subject moral combinations to the rules of calculation ; all the foundations of the exact sciences are invariable : but in moral ideas every thing depends upon circumstances ; nothing can be decided but by a multitude of different considerations, many of which are so fugitive, that they escape from the mind before they can reach the lip : how much sooner, then, would they escape from calculations ? Nevertheless, M. de Condorcet has clearly demonstrated, in his Essay on Probabilities, that it would be possible to know before-hand, almost to a certainty, what would be the opinions of an assembly upon any subject whatever. The calculation of probabilities, when applied to a great number of chances, presents a result morally infallible : it serves as a guide.



to all gamesters, although their object appears to be given up to every caprice of hazard : and why may it not have the same application to the multitude of facts of which the science of politics is composed ?

The catalogue of births and deaths will present a certain and invariable result, as long as there subsists a regular order of habitual circumstances : and the number of divorces, of thefts, and murders, that will be committed in a country where the population and the religious and political situation remain the same, may be calculated with the greatest precision : and thus we see those events, which depend upon the daily concurrence of all the human passions, arrive as exactly at their stated periods, as those that are subjected only to the laws of nature.

In calculating the proportion of ten years, it may be known exactly how many divorces have yearly taken place at Berne, and how many assassinations have been committed at Rome : if these then can be calculated to a certainty, is it not possible to prove that combinations of the moral order are as regular as combinations of the physical order, and to form a positive calculation from those combinations ?

But these calculations must be founded upon a constant uniformity of the mass and not on the diversity of particular examples ; all things are different in the moral order, if taken separately ; but if a hundred thousand chances are admitted, and the calculation is made from a hundred thousand different men taken promiscuously, you will know by a just approximation what number of enlightened men, what number of villains, what number of weak-minded, and what number distinguished by a superior understanding, are contained in the whole. This calculation would be still more exact, if the interest of each class was taken into the combination ; and in joining a calculation of the knowledge derived from any institution whatever, political power might be founded upon a basis nearly amounting to certainty. The resistance they were to meet with, might be measured and balanced betwixt themselves from the real action, and obstacles might be influenced from the very actions themselves. Why should we not be enabled one day to draw up a list that would be a solution of every political question, from the positive facts which may be collected from each country ? We might then be enabled to say, the administration of such a people requires such a sacrifice of individual liberty : such laws, or such a government, are suitable to such an empire : such a degree of strength will be necessary, in the executive power, for such an extent of country : such a state of authority is proper for such a country, and tyranny for another : such an equilibrium is necessary betwixt different powers for their mutual defence : such constitutions cannot maintain their power, and others are despotic from necessity. These examples might be prolonged ; but as the real difficulty of this idea is not in the abstract conception, but to apply it with precision, the indication of it will suffice.

I think they were wrong who blamed the French publicists, when they had it in view to apply calculations to politics : it was also wrong to have condemned them for having attempted to generalize causes : but there has often been reason to accuse them of a want of observation of those very facts which alone could have conducted to a discovery of causes.

The science of politics must be created : we can only as yet perceive at an obscure distance those principles and combinations of experience which are to lead to a result so certain, that the concatenation of most sciences may be, as we may say, submitted to the evidence of mathematical conclusions. The elements of sciences are not fixed ; what we call general ideas, are no more than special facts, which present only one side of a question, without permitting us to see the whole. Thus each new fact gives us a new but confused impression.

One year, all the declamation will be against the executive power : and another year, against the legislative assembly : one year, it will be against the liberty of the press ; and the next, against its subjection.

As long as this disorder of favorable circumstances shall exist, a happy hazard may establish, in some countries, institutions conformable to reason : but the general principles of politics will not be fixed, nor will the application of those principles to the modifications of social order be upon a sure foundation.

It is thus in America, that a great number of political problems appear to be solved, because the citizens are happy and independent : but this favorable hazard depends entirely upon particular circumstances, from which we cannot determine before-hand, what those principles are, nor what application they are susceptible of in other countries.

Neither can the long duration, and almost indestructible stability of some governments in Europe, be given as a proof of the progress of the human understanding in politics, because supported by their power ; and while maintaining a claim amongst themselves, they have secured to men some advantages of association. Despotism dispenses with political science, as force dispenses with knowledge, and as authority renders persuasion superfluous : but those means cannot be admitted when the interests of nations are discussed. Force is a hazardous combination, and destructive to every thing that belongs to thought and argument, both of which require the free exercise of liberty.

Despotism cannot, then, be an object for the calculations of the human mind : let us therefore examine the natural resources possessed by the understanding, to avoid going astray in its progressive march ; and not those means of violence and brutality, which can only preserve from error by stopping every progress.

The analyzing and uniting of ideas in mathematical order has this inestimable advantage, that it takes from the mind even the idea of opposition. Every subject that becomes susceptible of evidence, is out of the dominion of the passions, which then lose the hope of gaining the ascendancy : in the moral, as well as in the physical order, there are already many truths beyond the reach of their influence.

Since the time of Newton, there has been no new system upon the origin of colors, nor upon the motion of the earth. Since Locke, no one talks of innate ideas : it is now universally agreed, that all ideas are derived from the senses. But to acknowledge the evidence of political questions, is infinitely more difficult ; the passions have their interest to render it so : there are, however, some even of those questions already solved, and thus leave no farther hopes of debate to the spirit of party.

The state of slavery, the feudal system, and even religious disputes themselves, will never again excite to war : the light of knowledge is so generally unfolded upon these objects, that the most vehement spirits cannot now entertain the least hope of ever being able again to represent them under different aspects, and to form two parties, founded upon two different manners of judging and viewing the same ideas.

The philosophers ought then, in politics, to submit to positive combination those facts that are known to them, in order to draw a certain result from the number and nature of chances.

Algebraists will not tell you that you are going to throw such a number ; but they will calculate in how many turns of the dice this number ought to return ; and will not find themselves deceived. It will be the same with politicians : they will be certain of a return of the same events in a given time, provided the institutions remain the same.

It is however true, that no calculations require a greater multiplicity of different combinations. If the effects of a physical experience can be destroyed, or



because a trifling degree, more or less, of heat or cold, had been overlooked in the process ; what a profound study of the human heart is necessary to determine what influence should be given to government, that it should be able to enforce obedience without using the means of becoming unjust, and the action necessary to be employed by administration, in order to unite the nation in the same spirit, without shackling the genius of individuals ! How much experience is requisite to mark the exact point at which the executive power would cease to be an advantage, as that in which its absence would become an evil ! There is no problem composed of a greater number of terms, or in which an error would be productive of more dangerous consequences.

An abstract opinion that becomes an object of fanaticism, produces in the minds of men the most remarkable effects : ideas diametrically opposite to each other admitted, and exist simultaneously : the mind admits, one by one, every proposition, without even attempting to judge them ; it then creates factitious reports, the seeming abstraction of which pleases and exalts it ; for the imagination is as easily prepossessed by the abstract as by the most animated pictures of truth : the soaring of boundless ideas is singularly adapted to the exaltation of the mind.

When once the dogmas on metaphysical systems are adopted, people are then apt to stand up in defence of every thing, even of those ideas which they know to be false ; and by a singular effect of controversy, that which they have supported from argument, or from obstinacy, becomes at last that which they believe : and by always seeking for arguments to support one side of the question, they entirely lose sight of those by which they can be confuted their vanity is awakened and their passions exalted by the irritation which their self-love receives from contradiction ; and after a series of actions, at first inspired by opinion, their interest becomes united with the success of that opinion, and they find themselves irresistibly pushed forward by that interest : there pass in the interim many combats which they refuse to acknowledge even to themselves, and which they at last contrive to stifle altogether.

The devotees carry their scruples even to their most secret thoughts, and finish by making a crime of those transient doubts which sometimes shoot across their imagination ; it is the same with all kinds of fanaticism : imagination is as fearful of the return of reason, as of an enemy that would trouble the good understanding that existed between their chimeras and their weaknesses.

Fanaticism in politics, as in religion, is agitated by those rays of truth which appear at intervals even to the firmest belief ; and men persecute in others those doubts, the very first idea of which arose in their own minds ; and the faculty of belief, fantastical in its vehemence, is irritated by its own suspicion, in place of making use of it to arrive at the truth.

In this disposition of mind there are found arguments for every thing ; the most absurd opinions, and the most detestable maxims are received, when they once have acquired the form of general ideas. The contradictions are reconciled by a sort of geometrical logic, which, if not analyzed with the strictest scrutiny, is apt to appear like the severity of reason.

'This law, (said Couthon, when he proposed that of the twenty-second Praireal,) *assigns patriotic judges for the defence of the innocent ; but it assigns none for conspirators.*' Is not every part of the doctrine in this maxim perfectly correct ? And yet is it possible to unite more atrocious absurdities in so small a compass of words.

*This flowery style which often seduces the most upright minds, and which the strongest reason is hardly able to shake off, is one of the greatest scourges of im-*

perfect metaphysics ; for argument then becomes the weapon of folly and criminality, the abuse of abstract forms is united with the fury of persecution ; and man, by a monstrous mixture, combines the frenzy of superstition with all that is arid in philosophy.

It is impossible not to feel the want of a new doctrine to throw a light on this frightful mass of shapeless pretences, which serves as a screen to men of false principles, the villain and the little-minded ; as if transforming error into principle, and sophistry into consequence, could change the radical fallacy of a first assertion, and palliate the detestable effect of this abominable logic !

This new doctrine may now repose itself on a double basis, morality and calculation : but this principle is invariable, that whenever the calculations do not agree with morality, however incontestable their exactitude may appear at first sight, their result must be erroneous.

It has been said, that in the French revolution, barbarous speculators, founding their bloody laws on mathematical calculations, had coldly sacrificed millions of individuals to promote the supposed happiness of the greater number.

These monsters of human nature might have imagined, that they could have rendered their calculations more simple, by striking out sentiment, sufferings, and recollection ; but they could not have had the most distant idea of general truths, those truths which are composed of every individual existence, and every particular fact. The calculation is neither good nor useful, till it embraces every exception and regulates every variety : if you suffer one single circumstance to escape, your result must be false ; as the smallest error in arithmetic will render the solution of a problem impracticable.

The proof of the combinations of the mind is in the sentiment and in the experience : argument, under whatever form it may be presented, can never change nor modify the nature of things ; it can only analyze what already exists.

It has been advanced as a mathematical truth, that the smaller number ought to be sacrificed to the good of the greater : but nothing can be more erroneous, even with regard to political combinations : for the effects of injustice are such, that they must necessarily disorganize a state. If you sacrifice innocence to what may be deemed the good of the nation ; it is the nation itself which you devote to destruction. From action to re-action, from vengeance to vengeance, the victims that are immolated at the pretended altar of general good, will rise again from their ashes, and emerge from their exile ; and such as would have remained in obscurity, if justice had been exercised towards them, will receive a name and a consequence from the very persecutions of their enemies. It is the same with all political problems in which virtue is interested ; it is always possible to prove, by simple argument, that the solutions of those problems are false, if the calculation recedes in the smallest degree from the laws of morality.

Morality is to be placed above calculation ; for morality is the *nature* of the intellectual order : and as in the physical order, all calculations take their procedure from the *nature of things*, upon which they can produce no change ; so, in the intellectual order, it should proceed from the same point, that is to say, morality.

The cause of those absurd and atrocious errors which have discredited the use of abstract ideas in politics, is fully exemplified by the reflection, that in lieu of making morality the fundamental basis and supreme legislator, it was considered, at best, but as one of the elements of calculation, and not as its constant rule ; and sometimes only as an auxiliary, that might be modified or sacrificed at pleasure.

Let us then, in the first place, establish morality as

a fixed point ; let us then subject politics to calculations that take their procedure from this point ; and we shall then see, those *inconveniences* which have attended the application of metaphysics to social institutions and the interest of the human species, and with which they are so justly reproached to this day, would totally disappear.

Politics can be submitted to calculation, because, being always applied to a community, it is founded upon general combinations which are abstract, of course ; but morality, the aim and end of which is the particular conversation of the rights and happiness of each man, is absolutely necessary in order to force politics to respect, in their general combinations, the happiness of individuals. Morality should direct our calculations, and our calculations should direct our politics.

This place assigned to morality above calculation, is equally suitable both to public and private morals : it is to the omission of it, in the first case, that we are to ascribe those innumerable evils, the fatal effects of which we have so cruelly experienced. The rendering public morality subordinate to that which it ought itself to hold in subjection, has often been the ruin of thousands of individuals, under pretence of promoting the general good. There are likewise certain philosophical systems, which threaten private morals with the like degradation. The completion of every thing must ultimately be submitted to virtue : and although virtue is susceptible of a demonstration founded on the calculation of usefulness ; yet this calculation is not sufficient to serve it for a basis. As virtue has to encounter numerous obstacles, she has received from nature a variety of supports.

The sciences of morality are only susceptible of the calculation of probabilities : and this calculation can only be founded on a very great number of facts, of which the approximate result has previously been examined. As the science of politics is only applicable to men when united in a community, the probabilities in that science may almost amount to certainties, through the multitude of chances from which they are taken : and the institutions established on this foundation, applying likewise of themselves to the happiness of the multitude, cannot miss their aim. But morality includes each man individually, each fact, and each circumstance : and although a great majority of circumstances prove that a virtuous conduct is the best regard to the interests of this life ; yet it cannot be affirmed, that there are no exceptions to this general rule.

If, then, you wish to submit those exceptions to the same laws ; if you wish to inspire each man individually with morality, in whatever situation he may be ; you will find for each individual an animating and constant supply, which is renovated every day, yea every moment.

The moral alone, of all the human thoughts, is that which stands in need of any other regulator than reason : all the ideas that inflame the destiny of diverse men at the same time, are founded on their personal interests : yet if we were to give to each man his own personal interest for the guide of his conduct ; even if this guide did not lead him astray, it would always result, that the effects of this principle would be to dry up the source of every great and generous action.

Doubtless, it must appear that morality is always conformable to the interests of mankind : but to give it this sort of motive for a point of support, is to deprive the mind of the energy necessary for the sacrifices required by virtue.

There is no reasoning, however subtle, that can represent a generous act of self-devotion as a regular egotism : to do this, the grammatical acceptance of the word must be adopted in preference to the sentiment which it revives in the hearts of those who listen to it. Every thing brings us back to our own interest,

because every thing centres in ourselves : and yet no one would say, *Glory is my interest ; heroism is my interest ; the sacrifice of my life is my interest* : it would be degrading to virtue to tell a man it was merely his interest ; for if you acknowledge that his first motive should be honesty, you cannot surely refuse him some liberty in the judgment of his own concerns : and there are various circumstances in which it is impossible not to believe that morality and interest are at variance with each other. How then is it possible to convince a man, that an event entirely new and unexpected had been foreseen by those who had presented him with the general rules of conduct ? The rules of prudence, (and virtue which is founded solely on interest, amounts to no more,)—even those of its rules that are most known, are subject to a multitude of exceptions : why should virtue, when considered as a calculation of personal interest, be exempted ? There remains, then, no method of proving that virtue is always in unison with our interest, except that of returning to the idea of placing the happiness of man in the peaceful security of his own conscience ; which simply signifies, that the interior enjoyments of virtue are preferable to all the advantages of egotism.

It is not true, however, that personal interest is the most powerful spring of the actions of mankind : for pride, vanity, anger, self-love, and a variety of other circumstances, will easily make them sacrifice this interest ; and in virtuous minds, there exists a principle of action totally different from any single calculation whatever.

I have attempted in this chapter to develop how important it is to submit all the ideas of the human mind to mathematical demonstration : but although this kind of proof may be applied to morality, it is to the principles of life that it is more peculiarly attached : its impulsion precedes every kind of argument. The same creative power which sends back the blood towards the heart, inspires *courage* and *sensibility*, two sensations and two enjoyments wholly moral ; the empire of which you totally destroy, if you analyze them by personal interest, as you would destroy the charms of beauty by describing it as an anatomist.

The elements of our being, pity, courage, and humanity, act within us before we are capable of any calculation. In studying the various parts of nature, we must necessarily suppose some endowments anterior to the search of man. The impulse of virtue must ever take place of reasoning. Our organization, and the developments which the habits of infancy give to that organization, are the true causes of whatever is great in human actions, of the delights which the mind experiences in doing good. The religious ideas which pure minds are so fond of indulging, animate and consecrate this spontaneous elevation, and are the noblest and surest guarantees of morality. 'In the breast of a virtuous man (says Seneca) there resides a god ; but I am ignorant what god.' If this sentiment were translated into the language of the most enlightened egotism, what effect would it produce ?

It might be said, that this mode of expression belongs entirely to the imagination, and that the real sense of this idea, as of every other, is submitted to argument. Doubtless, reason is the faculty that judges all the other faculties : but it is not reason that constitutes the identity of the moral being. If we study ourselves, we shall find that the love of virtue precedes the faculty of reflection ; that this sentiment is intimately connected with our physical nature ; and that its impressions are often involuntary. Morality must be considered in man, as an inclination, as an affection, the principle of which is inherent in himself, and which is guided by his judgment. This principle may be strengthened by whatever enlarges the mind and expands the intellect.

There certainly exists a method of improving ever the theory of morality itself, by calculation and reflection.

tion : but that method, though useful when considered only as an auxiliary, becomes insufficient and fatal, if we attempt to substitute it in the place of sentiment, as it would contract the limits of morality, instead of extending them.

Philosophy, among its observations, recognizes primitive causes, pre-existing energies : and in the number of these, virtue must certainly be counted. Virtue is the offspring of creation, and not of analysis : it appeared almost at the same time with that instinct which prompts us to self-preservation : and compassion for others develops itself almost as soon as the dread of any ill that might happen to ourselves. I shall certainly not disavow what the wisdom of philosophy may add to the morality of sentiments : but as we should do an injury to national love in believing it to be only the result of reason, we must select in every virtue what is purely natural, and reserve to ourselves afterwards to throw a new light upon the best manner of directing its spontaneous movements.

Philosophy may discover the cause of the sentiments which we experience ; but it should only follow the course which those sentiments mark out for it. Instinct and reason teach us the same moral : thus Providence has twice repeated certain important truths to man, that they may not be lost to him when they especially concern his welfare, nor elude his diligent researches.

The man who loses himself in physical sciences, is re-conducted into the path of truth, by the applications he is to make of his combinations with material facts : but the man who devotes himself to the abstract ideas of which the moral sciences are composed, how can he be assured that his conceptions will be either good or just in the execution ? How can he dispense with the knowledge of experience, and carry his views towards futurity with any degree of certainty ? It can only be done in subjecting reason to morality ; without which nothing can subsist, nothing can prosper in opposition to its injunctions. The consolatory idea of an eternal Providence can fill the space of every other reflection ; but we must be on our guard, and distrust even morality itself, when it refuses to acknowledge a God for its author.

## CHAPTER VII.

### OF THE STYLE OF AUTHORS, AND THAT OF MAGISTRATES.

Before the career of philosophical ideas had excited the emulation of enlightened men in France, those works in which questions of literature and morality were discussed, when they were written with elegance, sublimity, and correctness, were holden in the highest estimation. Before the revolution, there existed a number of writers who had acquired a prodigious reputation, without ever considering objects in a general point of view, in carrying the ideas, both moral and political, entirely to literature, instead of subjecting literature to the ideas of morality and politics.

It is impossible, at this time, to feel any great degree of interest for writings which are only ingenious, and do not embrace the whole of the subjects on which they treat, never exhibiting them but on one side, and by such particulars as are no way connected with the first ideas, nor the profound impressions of which the nature of man is composed.

The style must necessarily have undergone some changes from the revolution which has taken place in the minds of men, as well as in institutions ; for style, not consisting in the grammatical turning of a period, cannot be looked upon as a single form, but as closely connected with the ideas and nature of the mind. *Style in writing, is like the character of a man ; and this character cannot be a stranger either to his opinions*

or his sentiments, but modifies his whole being. Let us, then, examine what style is most proper for philosophical minds under a free government.

The images, the sentiments, and the ideas, represent the same truths to man under three different forms ; and yet there subsist the same connections and the same consequences in these three provinces of the understanding. When you discover a new idea, you will find in nature some image that will serve to depict it, and in the heart, a sentiment that corresponds, by a resemblance which reflection causes you to discover. No writer can carry conviction and enthusiasm to any high degree, till he has acquired the knowledge of touching those three chords at the same time, the union of which is no other than the harmony of the creation.

It is from the more or less perfect combination of the means of influencing the sentiments, the imagination, or the judgment, that we may appreciate the merit of different authors. There is no style worthy of praise, if it do not contain two out of those three qualities, which, when united, form the perfection of the art of writing.

Fine conceptions, subtle ideas which do not connect themselves with the great chain of general truths, and ingenious relations which exercise the genius to detach itself from the mind instead of applying to it for its principal support, can never place an author in the first rank.

If you particularize your ideas over-much, they slide into mere images and sentiments which conglomerate instead of separating. Neither are abstract combinations which sentiment repels, and which exhaust the imagination, more congenial to this universal nature, the sublimity of which is to be represented by the beauties of style. Images that throw no light on any idea, are no more than whimsical phantoms, or simply pictures of amusement : sentiments that awake no moral idea, no general reflection, are most certainly affected, and can answer to nothing real in any style.

Marivaux, for example, presented always the studied side of the discoveries of the mind : his writings possessed neither philosophical ideas, nor lively descriptions. It is impossible that sentiments which do not proceed from just ideas, can be susceptible of natural images. Those thoughts that may be offered under the double aspect of sentiment and imagination, are the first of the moral order : but when the ideas are too much refined, they have no terms of comparison in animated nature.

In the positive sciences, you only need abstract forms ; but when you treat upon other philosophical subjects, you must remain where you can make use at once of reason, imagination, and sentiment ; faculties that all combine, by different means, to the development of the same truths.

Fenelon joins soft and pure sentiments to the images that properly belong to them : Bossuet unites philosophical ideas with those pictures that command respect. Rousseau combines the passions of the heart with the natural effects which produce them : Montesquieu, in his dialogue of Eucrate and Sylla, comes very near to uniting all the qualities of style, connection of ideas, the profundity of sentiment, and the force of imagery. There are found in those dialogues all the grandeur and elevation of fine ideas, with as much of the figurative as is necessary to the complete development of philosophic conception. We do not feel, while perusing the beautiful pages of Montesquieu, that tenderness which an impassioned eloquence ought to give birth to, but the sensation caused by what is truly admirable in every style : it is that kind of emotion felt by strangers on entering St Peter's, at Rome ; where every instant they discover some new beauty that absorbs, as we may say, the striking effect of the whole.

Malbranche endeavored to combine ideas with images, in his Essay on Metaphysics : but as his ideas were

not founded on truth, we can but very imperfectly discover the union he wished to establish between them and his brilliant images. Garat, in his *Lessons to the Normal Schools*, is a model of perfection in that style : and Rivarol, in spite of some studied expressions, makes you perfectly conceive the possibility of this perfect harmony, between the images drawn from nature, and the ideas which serve to form the chain of principles and their deductions in the moral order. Who can tell to what length this power of analysis may be carried, which, when united to imagination, so far from being destructive to any thing, adds new life to every thing, and, imitating nature, concentrates the divers elements of life in the same focus ?

A work upon the principles of taste, upon music, or painting, may become a work of philosophy, if it be addressed to man altogether ; if it excite in his breast those sentiments and thoughts which aggrandize every question ; while a discourse upon the most important interests of human society, may fatigue the mind, if it contain nothing but mere circumstances, or if it present important subjects crowded into a narrow compass, and does not carry the mind to general considerations by which it is interested.

The charm of style dispenses with the efforts required by the conception of abstract ideas ; figurative expressions rouse every spark of life within ; and an animated picture encourages you to pursue a long chain of ideas and arguments. There is no longer any occasion to struggle with absence of mind, when the imagination is captivated ; it commands of itself the power of attention.

If works purely literal do not contain that sort of analysis which aggrandizes every object it comprehends ; if it does not characterize the particulars without losing sight of the whole ; and if they do not prove at the same time their knowledge of men, and their study of life ; they must appear but as works of puerility. In a free country, when a man renders himself remarkable by his writing, it is required that he should indicate, in those writings, the important qualities that the nation may one day claim from some one of her citizens, of whatever class or denomination : but a work that is not philosophically written, may class its author among artists, but can never elevate him to the rank of thinkers.

Since the revolution, the French have launched into a fault that is particularly destructive to the beauties of style : they wished, by employing new verbs, to abridge all their phrases, and render all their expressions abstruse :\* but nothing can be more contrary to the talent of a great writer. Concision does not consist in the art of diminishing the number of words : much less does it consist in the privation of images. The concision which we should be ambitious of attaining, is such a one as that of Tacitus, which is at once both eloquent and energetic :—energy, so far from being prejudicial to that brevity of style we so justly admire, that figurative expressions are those by which the greater number of ideas are retraced in the smallest compass. Neither can the invention of new words contribute towards perfection of style. Masters of the art may secure the reception of a few when they are involuntarily created by a sudden impulse of thought ; but in general, the invention of words is a sure symptom of a sterility of ideas. When an author permits himself to make use of a new word : the reader, who is not accustomed to it, stops to judge it ; and this breaking in upon the attention hurts the general and continued effect of the style.

All that has been said of bad taste, may be equally applied to the faults of the language which has been employed by many writers, for these ten years past. Nevertheless, there are some of those faults which more particularly belong to the influence of political

\* *Utiliser, activer, préciser, &c.*

events ; which I propose to discuss in speaking of eloquence.

When philosophy makes a new progress, style must necessarily proceed on to perfection. The literary principles that may be applied to the art of writing, have been almost all developed ; but the knowledge and study of the human heart ought each day to add to the sure and rapid means which have effect upon the mind. Every time that an impartial public are not moved and persuaded by a discourse, or a work, the fault *must* lie in the author : but it is almost always to what he is deficient in as a moralist, that his fault as a writer must be attributed.

It often happens in society, when listening to those who have the desire of persuading their auditors of their sensibility, or their virtue ; that we cannot help remarking how little they have observed that nature, whose characteristic signs they wish to imitate : and authors are for ever falling in the same error, when they wish to develop moral truths or profound sentiments. Doubtless, there are some subjects in which art cannot supply what is really experienced by nature ; but there are others which might be handled with success, if profound reflections were first made upon the impressions that are experienced by the greater part of mankind, and the means of giving birth to them.

It is the gradation of terms, the agreement and choice of suitable words, the rapidity of certain forms, the development of certain motives, or lastly, the style itself perhaps, which actuate the opinions, and insinuate themselves into the persuasion of men. An expression which at the bottom changes nothing of the idea, but which has not a natural application, must become an object of speculation to most readers. Too strong an epithet may entirely destroy the effect of an argument founded on truth ; and the slightest shade may entirely turn aside the imagination that was proposed to follow you. An obscurity in the arrangement, which reflection might easily have penetrated, takes away, all at once, the interest you have inspired. In short, style requires some of those qualities that are necessary to govern mankind : we must know their faults, sometimes spare, and sometimes subdue them ; but the utmost care must be taken to guard against that pride which, inciting men to accuse a nation rather than themselves, refuse to admit the general opinion, as the supreme judge of their talents.

Ideas in themselves are independent of the effects which they produce : but the aim of style being precisely to engage mankind to adopt the ideas which it expresses ; if the author does not obtain his aim, it is because his penetration has not yet discovered the road which leads to the secrets of the heart, and the principles of judgment ; which he must first become master of himself, in order to influence the opinion of others.

It is in this style, above all, that we may remark that grandeur of soul which distinguishes the character of the *man* in the *writer*. The purity and grandeur of the language add greatly to the consideration of those who govern, particularly in a country where a political equality is established. Real dignity of language is the best method of pronouncing all moral distinctions : it also inspires a respect that improves those who experience it. In short, it is possible that the art of writing may one day become one of the principal powers of a free state.

When the first legislators of a country are possessed of this power, it forms of itself an union betwixt those who govern and those who are governed. Doubtless, actions are the best guarantees for the morality of mankind : nevertheless, I believe there exists an ascent in words, and, of course, a character in the forms of style, which attests the qualities of the mind with more certitude than even actions themselves. This sort of style is not an art that may be acquired by the understanding ; it is the real exhibition of the heart

Men of imagination, by transporting themselves into the character of another, may discover what that other might have said: but when they speak in their own character, it is their own sentiments which appear, even in defiance of their efforts to conceal them. There never existed an author who, in speaking of himself, knew how to give an idea superior to the truth. A word, a false transition, an exaggerated expression, reveals what they most wish to conceal.

If a man of great talents as an orator, was accused, and had to plead his own cause before a tribunal; it would be easy to judge, by his manner of defence, whether he was innocent or guilty, every time that words are called in testimony. It is not possible to take from language that character of truth implanted by nature: it is no longer a deceptive art; what they feel, escapes in a thousand different ways from what they relate.

The virtuous man has a proof of his innocence which the wicked cannot deprive him of; it is a mark set upon him by his Creator, which his fellow-men cannot misconstrue. The calm and dignified expression of an elevated sentiment, the clear and simple manner of announcing a fact, that style of reason which belongs only to virtue, cannot be counterfeited: this language is not only the result of virtuous sentiments, but they are also forcibly inspired by it.

The noble and simple beauties of certain expressions command respect even from those who pronounce them; and among other woes attached to self-contempt, we must also add the loss of this language, which causes the most exalted and pure emotions to those who are worthy of using it.

This style of the mind, if I may thus express myself, is one of the greatest supports of a free government; it arises from such a train of sentiments as must be in concordance with those of every honest man, and from such a confidence and respect for the public opinion, that it is a certain proof of much present happiness, and a sure guarantee of much happiness to come.

When an American, in announcing the death of General Washington, said, *'Divine Providence hath been pleased to withdraw from the midst of us this man, the first in war, the first in peace, and the first in the affections of his country!'* what sentiments, what ideas are recalled to the mind by those expressions! Does not this acknowledgment of divine Providence indicate, that, in this enlightened country, no ridicule is thrown upon religious ideas, nor on those regrets expressed in the tenderness of the heart! This simple encomium on a great man, and the gradation which gives for the last term of his glory, *'the affections of his country,'* conveys to the heart a deep and tender emotion.

How many virtues, in fact, are comprehended in the love of a free nation for their first legislator! for a man who, after twenty years of unblemished reputation in a public character, became, by his own choice, a private individual! It appears as if he had only traversed the fields of power, in the journey of life, as a road that led to retirement; a retirement honored by the most noble, elevating, and pleasing recollections!

Never, in any crisis of the French revolution, was there to be found a man who could have spoken the language of which I have recited the above few remarkable words; but in every report that hath reached us of the connection that subsisted between the American legislators and the citizens, there are to be found this purity and grandeur of style, which can only be inspired by the conscience of an honest man.

Every pure government is called, by the form of institutions, to develop and comment upon the motives of its resolves. When, in the moment of peril, the French legislators addressed the people in those eloquent phrases which they were accustomed to use among themselves, they produced no effect on the mind of a public weakened by every ineffectual effort

that was attempted to rouse in them the wished for enthusiasm; but enthusiasm was farther from reviving than ever, though often having been solicited in vain.

I think I may venture to affirm, that my father was the first, and hitherto one of the most perfect models of the art of writing, for a man in a public capacity: he possessed in full the talent of appealing to the opinions of mankind, and making them serviceable to the support of government, and of re-animating the principles of morality in the breasts of mankind; a power, of which the magistrates ought to look upon themselves as the representatives; a power, which alone can give them the right of demanding any sacrifice of the nation. In spite of our losses of every kind, since the time of M. Necker, there exists a visible progress in the language used by the chiefs of government: they have called reason to their discussions, and sometimes sentiments: but even then, they appear to me much inferior in precise eloquence, to M. Necker.

When once the power of words is admitted into political interests, they become of the highest importance in those states where despotic law strikes silently on the heads of individuals; the first consideration is then precisely, that silence which leaves the supposition of everything to hope or fear. But when the government enters with the nation into the examination of its interests, the grandeur and the simplicity of the expressions which they employ, are the only means of gaining them the esteem and confidence of the multitude.

Certainly, all the great men we are acquainted with, have not distinguished themselves as writers; but there are very few who have not exercised the empire of words: all the grand discourses and celebrated expressions of the heroes of antiquity are models of style; they are expressions which were inspired by genius or by virtue, which talent has collected or imitated. The laconism of the Spartans, and the energetic expressions of Phocion, harmonized as well, and often better, than the most regularly sustained discourses, the necessary attributes of the power of language: this manner of expression acted on the imaginations of the people, characterized the motives of the actions of government, and set forth in a conspicuous manner the sentiments of the legislators.

Such are the principal aids that political authority can derive from the art of speaking to mankind; such are the advantages which may be secured to order, to morality, and to the public spirit, by the measured, solemn, and occasionally affecting style of those men who are called to the government of the states. But this is as yet only one point gained of the power of language; and the boundaries of the career we now run, will long recede before us: we shall see that power rise to a much higher degree, if we contemplate it when defending liberty, protecting innocence, or struggling with oppression; if, in one word, we examine it in the appearance of eloquence.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### OF ELOQUENCE.

In free countries, the political destiny of nations being decided by their own will, men seek and acquire in the highest degree, the means of influencing that will; and the first of all is *eloquence*. Efforts of all kinds acquire strength in proportion as they are recompensed; and when power and honor are held out by government as a reward of genius; those who are worthy of obtaining the prize, are not tardy in presenting themselves to demand it. Emulation will develop talents, which would have remained unknown in a state where no remuneration could be offered worthy of the acceptance of a great mind.

Let us, nevertheless, examine the reason, why, since the first years of the revolution, eloquence in France has been altered so much for the worse, instead of following its natural progress in the deliberating assemblies; let us examine how it may revive and come to perfection; and conclude by a general observation upon its utility towards the progress of the human understanding and the support of liberty.

Energy in discourse cannot be separated from measure. If every thing is permitted, nothing can produce any great effect. To treat moral confederations with caution, is to respect talents, services, and virtues; it is to honor, in each man, the rights which his life has given him to the public esteem. If you confound by a gross and scrupulous equality what distinguishes the equality of nature; the social state would resemble the confusion of a battle, in which nothing is to be heard but the shouts of war or fury. What power then remains to eloquence, and what means can it employ to strike the mind by new ideas or happy expressions, by the contrast of vice with virtue, or by praise or blame distributed by the hand of justice? In that chaos of sentiment and ideas that existed for some time in France no orator could flatter by his esteem, or dishonor by his contempt: as no man at that time could be either honored or degraded.

In such a state of affairs, what could it avail to accuse or defend? Where was the tribunal that could absolve or condemn? What was there that was impossible? or what was there that was certain? If you were audacious, whom would you astonish? and if you were peaceable, who would notice it? Where is the dignity, if nothing is in its proper place? What difficulties are there to overcome, if there exists no obstacle? But, above all, what monument can be erected without a basis? Praise and abuse may be distributed in every direction, without creating either enthusiasm or hatred. It was no longer known what was to fix the esteem of man: calumny commanded by the spirit of party, and praises excited by terror, rendered every thing doubtful; and words, wandering from reason, struck upon the ear without aim or effect.

When Cicero defended Murena against the authority of Cato, he was eloquent, because he knew how to honor the virtues, while opposing the authority of a man like Cato. But in our assemblies, where every kind of invective was admitted; who would have noticed the delicate shades in the expressions of Cicero? or who would think of imposing an useless restraint upon himself, when no one would understand the motive, or receive the impression? The voice of a senator shouting from the tribunal, *Cato is a revolutionary, a stipendiary of our enemies; I require that the death of this culprit should satisfy the national justice*; would soon have made them forget the eloquence of Cicero.

In a country where the ascendancy of moral ideas is annihilated, the mind can only be moved by the fear of dissolution: words, it is true, still retain the power of a destructive weapon; but all intellectual force is gone; they are dreaded as a danger, but not as an insult; they can no longer injure the reputation of any one. This multitude of calumnious writers blunt even the resentment which they inspire, and successively take their power from every expression they make use of. A delicate mind experiences a sort of disgust for a language, the expressions of which are found in the writings of such men. A contempt of confederation deprives eloquence of every effect that is connected with wisdom, sobriety and the knowledge of mankind; and reasoning can have no empire in a country where they disdain even the appearance of truth.

In many periods of the revolution, the discourses were filled with the most abominable sophisms: the party phrases which the orators repeated, with the desire of excelling each other, fatigued the ear, and dis-

honored the heart. There is no variety but in nature; and new ideas can only be inspired by just sentiments. What effect could be produced by that monotonous violence, that power of words, which left the mind so languid? *It is time you should be acquainted with the real truth. The nation was buried in a slumber worse than that of death; but the representatives of the nation were there. The people are at last aroused from their lethargy, &c.* Or, in other words, *the time of abstractions is past; social order is re-seated on its basis, &c.*

I must stop here, or this imitation would become as tiresome as the reality itself: but there may be extracted from journals, from discourses, and addresses, numberless pages in which we may see words without thoughts, without sentiment, and without truth; it was a kind of litany as if they wished to exercise eloquence and reason, by a certain number of set phrases.

What talent could rise through expressions so absurd, insignificant, false, exaggerated, and vulgar? How was it possible that the mind should not be hardened against words by such a number of untruths? How was it possible to convince reason, fatigued by error, and rendered suspicious by sophisms? Individuals of the same party, united by the most important interest, were accustomed, in France, to look upon discourses only as the order of the day, that was to rally soldiers serving under the same banner. It would have been less burdensome to the mind, and eloquence would not have been entirely lost, if they had contented themselves by commanding in their deliberations, as in battle, by a simple sign of the will.

But in France, force, while having recourse to terror, wished, nevertheless, to patch up a species of argumentation; and vanity, uniting itself to vehemence, was eager to justify by discourse, the most absurd doctrines and unjustifiable actions. But to whom were those discourses addressed? Not to the victims; it would have been difficult to have convinced them of the usefulness of their misfortunes: it could not have been to the tyrants; for they were not to be brought to a decision even by the arguments which they themselves made use of: and it could not have been to posterity, whose inflexible judgment is formed on the nature and consequence of things. But their aim was to avail themselves of political fanaticism, and to blend, under certain heads, the truth of some principles with the most iniquitous and ferocious consequences that might be drawn from them by the passions; and thus to create a reasoning despotism, mortally fatal to the empire of knowledge.

The voice of truth, which conveys to the mind such exalted and pleasing sentiments, and those just and noble expressions of a heart at ease and of a character without reproach, were no where to be heard; it was not known to whom, or to what opinion they were to be addressed, or under what roof they would have been listened to: and that pride which was the natural inheritance of a Frenchman, induced them rather to be silent than to exhaust themselves in useless efforts.

The first of moral truths is that also which is most fruitful in eloquence: but when a licentious philosophy delights to debase, in order to confound every thing; what virtue can be honored by your voice? what brilliancy can you throw upon any object in this universal darkness of the mind? or how will you raise enthusiasm in men who have nothing to hope and nothing to fear from the voice of fame; and who did not recognize, even amongst themselves, the same principles as judges of the same actions?

Morality is inexhaustible in sentiments, and fruitful in ideas for the man of genius, who can penetrate into and avail himself of them. What was deemed a divine spirit by the ancients, was doubtless the consciousness of virtue in the mind of the just, the power of

united to a talent of eloquence. But in our days, how many men shrink from morality, lest they should find in it the accuser of their own lives! how many others will admit no general ideas, till they have compared them with their own private actions and interest! and, again, how many, though inapprehensive on their own accounts, dare not speak with enthusiasm of justice and equity, through fear of galling the recollection of some of their auditors, and try to present morality sideways as it were, to give it the form of public utility, to throw a veil upon principle, and to make an agreement with pride and remorse at the same time, which mutually warn each other of their irritable interest.

Crimes may cloud the judgment, and turn reason aside by the force of vehemence; but virtue would not dare entirely to unveil herself: though it might wish to convince, it would fear to offend: and it is morally impossible for any one to be eloquent, while he is obliged to abstain from truth. Those barriers that are imposed by respectable convenience, as I have already observed, are useful even to the successes of eloquence: but when, by condescension for injustice or egotism, the movements of an elevated mind must be repressed; when not only facts and their application must be avoided, but even the general considerations that might offer to the imagination all ideas of truth, and all energy arising from sentiments of honesty; no man subjected to such restraints, can be eloquent; and the esteemed orator who is compelled to speak under such circumstances, naturally chooses those phrases that have been most used, upon which the experience of the passions has been already made, and which having been acknowledged inoffensive, pass through the rage of fury without exciting it.

Factions are also serviceable to the progress of eloquence, while they stand in need of the opinion of impartial men, and whilst they dispute betwixt themselves the voluntary assent of the nation: but when political movements have arrived at that term where force only can decide between the parties; what assistance they receive from words, of the resources of discussion, serve only to the degradation of the mind and the destruction of eloquence, instead of developing it: to speak in the midst of unjust power, is to impose on self the most complete servitude. Every absurdity must be supported that forms the long chain which conducts to criminal resolutions; and the character would, if possible, retain more integrity after having committed a blameable action inspired by passion, than after one of those discourses in which meanness and cruelty are distilled, drop by drop, with a sort of art which they in a manner forced themselves to render ingenious.

But how shameful, how degrading to human nature, to prostitute sense in support of rigor and oppression! How shameful to feel a self-love, when all pride is lost! and to think of personal success in sacrificing the life and happiness of others! to employ in the service of unjust power that sort of talent devoid of conscience, which, like the satellites of force, lend to men in power ideas and expressions, which they employ as forerunners of authority to clear the way before injustice!

No one will attempt to maintain, that eloquence has not entirely changed its nature for some years back: but many affirm, that it is impossible it should ever revive, and again acquire any perfection: while others pretend, that the talent of oratory is destructive to the repose, and even to the liberty of the nation. These two errors I shall attempt to refute.

It may be asked, What ground of hope have you, that eloquent men should make themselves heard! Eloquence cannot compose itself of moral ideas or virtuous sentiments: and what hearts would now be opened to *sentiments of generosity*? After ten years of revolution, who would be moved by virtue, delicacy, or bounty?

steady coolness of vice! could they raise a blush in the cheeks of those on whom the presence of an honest man has no effect! Tell those quiet possessors of the enjoyments of life, that their interest is at stake; and you will disquiet their impassibility: but what can they learn from eloquence! It would draw upon them the contempt of virtue. Alas! have they not known for a long time past, that each one of their days is covered with opprobrium! Would you address yourself to men eager in the pursuits of fortune, new as they are to the habits and the enjoyments which it permits! If you could for a moment inspire them with a noble design, they would be deficient in the courage necessary to put it into execution. Would you attempt to preach benevolence to hatred and ill-will? You would find yourself equally repulsed. If, indeed, you speak in the name of power; you will be heard with respect, whatever may be your language: but if you put in your claim for the weak; if your generosity has made you prefer the cause forsaken by favor and adopted by humanity; you will excite nothing but the resentment of the predominant faction. You live in an era in which misfortune excites nothing but indignation, and oppression nothing but contempt; where anger is inflamed by the aspect of the vanquished; where tenderness is moved, or men exult in power, as soon as it happens that they are to become sharers therein.

What would become of eloquence in the midst of such sentiments as these; eloquence, which, to be affecting and sublime, must have some peril to brave, some unfortunate to defend, and glory holden up as the reward of courage! Can it thus make its appeal to the nation! Alas! has not this unfortunate nation heard the names of every virtue prostituted in the defence of crimes! Is it possible it could yet recognize the voice of truth! The most respectable of our citizens repose in the tomb; and the multitude which remain, live neither for enthusiasm, for morality, nor for glory; they live for repose, which is almost equally disturbed by the fury of crimes, and the generous flights of virtue.

These objections might for some time damp the most sanguine hopes, and discourage expectation; nevertheless, it appears to me impossible but that what there is of good in us, should at last acquire an ascendancy; and I shall ever believe that the orators or the writers are in fault, when a discourse pronounced in the midst of a great number of men, or a book that has the public for its judges, produces no effect.

Doubtless, if you address yourself to a few individuals who are united by one common interest, or one common fear; it is certain that no talents can influence them: in their hearts the natural sources have long been dried up, which the voice of a prophet could draw even from a stone. But when you are surrounded by a multitude that contains all the different elements; if you speak to human nature, it will answer you; if you possess the secret of giving that electrical commotion, the principles of which are likewise contained in the moral being, you need no more be afraid of the coolness of indifference; the mockery of injustice, the calculations of egotism, or the ridicule of the envious; all that multitude is your own: should they escape from the beauties of the tragic art, the divine sounds of celestial music, or the enthusiasm inspired by the songs of warriors, they may still be captivated by reason: should the mind feel the want of exaltation, seize the inclination, inflame the desire, and you will carry the opinion.

If we call to mind the cold and phlegmatic countenances that we meet in the world, I own that it seems next to an impossibility to move their hearts; but the attention of the greater part of those men who are known, is taken up by their past actions, their present



friendly expression presages a heart not yet known, a heart that would understand your own, and coincide with your sentiments! This multitude is the true representative of the nation. You must forget what you know and what you fear, from such and such men, and give yourself entirely up to your own ideas and emotions; and in spite of every obstacle, you will draw after you every free affection, and every mind that has not received the impression of some yoke, or the price of servitude.

But by what means can we flatter ourselves that we shall be enabled to bring eloquence to perfection, if it be true that we yet hope for success? Eloquence, belonging more to sentiment than to ideas, appears less susceptible of an indefinite progress than philosophy: nevertheless, as new sentiments are developed by new ideas, the progress of philosophy ought to furnish eloquence with new means of bringing itself to perfection.

Intermediate ideas may be traced in a more rapid manner, when the concatenation of a great number of truths is generally understood: the mind may constantly be sustained in the regions of thought, and interested by moral reflections that are universally understood without having been rendered common. What is sublime in some of the ancient discourses, are words which can neither be foreseen nor forgotten, and which, like great actions, leave their traces through subsequent ages. But if the method and precision of argument, the style and necessary ideas, are susceptible of perfection; surely the modern discourses may acquire by their example great superiority over the models of antiquity; and what belongs to imagination, must necessarily produce more effect, if nothing weakens that effect, but on the contrary every thing serves to strengthen it.

That which characterizes eloquence, the movement which actuates the genius that develops it, requires the greatest independence of the mind, at least a momentary one, from every thing that surrounds us; we must rise above personal danger, above the opinions which we attack, and the men whom we oppose; and, in short, above every thing but conscience and posterity. Philosophical ideas will naturally lead to this elevation, when the expression of truth becomes so easy that the images and energies which serve to paint it, present themselves to the mind, animated with the purest and most exalted ardor.

This elevation takes nothing from that vivacity of sentiment so necessary to eloquence, or that ardor which alone can give the accent that irresistible energy and character of domination, that men acknowledge in themselves; which they often call in question, but against which they have no defence.

A man whom reflection had rendered totally insensible to the surrounding events, a character resembling that of Epictetus; should he write, his style would not be eloquent: but when the spirit of philosophy reigns in the enlightened classes of society, it unites itself to the most vehement passions; it is no longer the result of the ascendancy of each man over himself, but an opinion established from infancy; an opinion that, mixing with every sentiment of nature, aggrandizes the ideas, but without rendering the mind insensible. There were but very few of the ancients who adopted the maxims of the Stoics, which repress the movements of the heart: the philosophy of the moderns, although it acts more on the mind than on the character, is only a peculiar manner of considering every object. This manner of seeing, once adopted by enlightened men, though influencing the general tenor of their conduct, cannot triumph over the affections of the heart; it destroys neither love nor ambition, nor any of the important interests by which the minds of men are continually occupied, even where their reason is no longer deceived by them: but this meditative philosophy throws a melancholy into the picture of the passions,

which adds another degree of profundity and eloquence to their language.

This character of melancholy, which will be more and more developed by the subsequent ages, may give a very great character to eloquence. The man who is ardent in his wishes; if he is endowed with a superior genius, constantly feels himself above the aim he is in pursuit of; and this idea, vague and gloomy, renders the expression at once affecting and imposing. But if moral truths should ever arrive to demonstration, and the language that is to express them, nearly to a mathematical precision; what will become of eloquence? All that belongs to virtue, would certainly be derived from another source, and be founded on another principle than that of reasoning; and yet with all this, eloquence will always reign in the empire which it ought to possess. It is true, it would not be exercised any more in political sciences where there are abstract ideas of any kind; but it would be still more respected, as it could not be represented as dangerous when concentrated in its natural focus, in the power of sentiment upon the mind.

There has been for some time past an absurd system established with regard to eloquence; struck with the abuse that has been made use of since the revolution, they now declare against eloquence; they even wish to take every precaution to guard against danger, which is as yet certainly not very imminent: and, as if the French nation were condemned to move forever in the circle of false ideas, and because men have once maintained injustice with violence, and even with vulgarity, they now refuse to suffer the power of sentiment to be called to the aid of justice.

It appears to me, on the contrary, that it might be maintained, that eloquence and truth are synonymous; that is to say, that in pleading an unjust cause, it is the reasoning that is false; but eloquence, properly speaking is always founded on truth, although it is very easy to deviate in the application or the consequence; in which case the error certainly lies in the argument. Eloquence requiring the impulsion of the mind, addresses itself to the sentiments: and the sentiments of the multitude are always on the side of virtue. It has often happened that an individual, when alone, has yielded to dishonest motives; but man, in the presence of man, will only submit to such sentiments as he may own without a blush.

Religion and political fanaticism have occasioned the most horrible excesses, by moving the multitude with inflammable expressions; but it was the falsity of their arguments, and not the interior movements of the heart, which rendered their words so fatal.

What is eloquent in religious fanaticism, is the sentiment which reconciles the sacrifice of ourselves to what may please the beneficent creator: but what is false, is the reasoning by which we are persuaded it is right to assassinate those of a different opinion; and that such sacrifices are pleasing, and even required by the supreme being.

What is real in political fanaticism, is the love of our country, of liberty, and justice: which every man has an equal right to, as to the providence of the eternal; but that which is false, is the reasoning which justifies every crime to arrive at the aim which a man believes to be useful.

Let us examine all the different subjects of discussion among men, and all the celebrated discourses that have been employed in those discussions; and we shall perceive that eloquence was always founded upon the truth of the question; and that its nature was only changed by reasoning: because sentiment cannot err in itself, and the only possible errors are the consequences drawn from it by argument: and those errors will never exist, while the language of logic is not fixed in a positive manner, and adapted to the understanding of the greater number.



I am well aware that there are many arguments which men may try to direct against eloquence ; nevertheless, it is with this as with every other advantage permitted by our destiny, they have all their inconveniences, which are brought forward by the wind of faction. But in the strict examination of things, what gifts of nature are there which are wholly exempt from evil ? The imperfection of human nature always leaves one side defenceless ; the only use of reason is to decide for the majority of advantages against partial inconveniences.

Didactic arguments are not always sufficient for the defence of liberty : when there is danger to be braved, or a generous resolution to be taken, eloquence alone has power to give the necessary impulse. A very small number of characters really distinguished may be decided, in the calm of retirement, solely by the sentiment of virtue : but when courage is requisite to the accomplishment of a duty, the generality of men do not confide in their own strength till their minds are affected, nor forget their own interest till their blood is agitated. Eloquence affects the mind like martial music, and hardens it against danger. An assembled body of men will have the courage and virtue of the most distinguished among them. By eloquence, the virtue of one individual is conveyed to every one by whom he is surrounded. If eloquence be interdicted, an assembly of men will always be influenced by the most vulgar sentiments : for in the habitual state those sentiments are predominant ; and it is to the talent of speech that we are indebted for every noble and intrepid resolution which has ever been adopted.

To interdict eloquence, would be the total destruction of glory : a free scope must be given to the expressions of enthusiasm, to inspire it in others : there must be freedom in every thing, in order to give to applause that character which commands respect from reason and prosperity.

In fine, if the belief be persisted in, that eloquence is dangerous ; let reflection pause for an instant upon what would be requisite to stifle it ; and it will plainly be perceived, that it is with that as with liberty, and every other grand development of the human understanding. It may be, that some evils are attached to those advantages ; but in order to guard against those evils, every thing that is useful, great, and generous, in the exercise of moral faculties, must be annihilated. This is the last idea which I propose to develop, before I conclude this work.

## CHAPTER IX.

### CONCLUSION.

The perfectibility of the human species has become an object of derision to those who look upon intellectual occupations as a kind of imbecility of the mind, and only hold in estimation those faculties which are immediately connected with the interests of life. This system of perfectibility is also opposed by some men of reflection ; but above all, at this moment it meets with the greatest opposition in France, from those sentiments, void of reflection, and those affections composed of nothing more than passion, which, by confounding the greatest oppositions, becomes entirely subservient to men whose designs are criminal, by giving them the appearance of honorable motives.

When philosophy is accused of the crimes of the revolution, it is wrongfully attaching base and unworthy actions to the most noble and exalted ideas ; the elucidation of which belongs to the subsequent ages. *Would it not be better to render the abyss which separates virtue from vice still greater, by uniting*

the love of knowledge to that of morality, and winning over to her side every thing that is grand or elevated among men, in order to deliver up guilt to every species of shame, ignorance, and ignominy ? But whatever may be the received opinion of those conquests of time over the indefinite empire of reason, it appears to me that there exists an argument which may be equally applicable to all.

It is said that the development of knowledge, and every advantage thence derived, as eloquence, political liberty, and the independence of religious opinions, are destructive to the repose and happiness of the human species. But let us contemplate for a moment the means that must be employed to avert the natural desire of knowledge inherent in mankind : how is a stop to be put to this evil, if it be really one, without having recourse to means horrible in themselves, and which after all would prove ineffectual ?

I have attempted to show with what force philosophical reason, in spite of every obstacle, and after every misfortune, has always known how to open itself a way, and has successively developed itself in every country, as soon as a toleration, however limited, gave to men the liberty of thinking. How then is it possible to force the human reason to retrograde ? And even if this melancholy success could be obtained, how is it possible to foresee and prevent all those circumstances that may give a new impulse to moral faculties ? It is the first desire even of kings, that a progress should be made in literature and the fine arts : this progress is necessarily connected with all those ideas which must carry reflection much farther than the subjects which they have given birth to. When the aim of a literary work is to influence the mind, it must necessarily partake of philosophical ideas : and philosophical ideas will ever lead to the discovery of truth.

If they could imitate the Inquisition of Spain, and the despotism of Russia, they still could not be certain that no other institutions could be established in other countries of Europe : for even the simple concerns of commerce, when every other was interdicted, would terminate by becoming the means of communicating the knowledge of one country to another.

The aim of physical sciences being of immediate utility, no country would choose, even if it had the power, to interdict them ; this being the case, would not the study of nature destroy the belief of certain dogmas ? And would not a religious independence lead to the free examination of every authority ? It may perhaps be said, that without shackling knowledge it might be possible to restrain its excesses : but by whom are those excesses to be repressed ? By government ! Surely that can never be considered as an impartial power : and would the bounds prescribed by them to the researches after truth, be precisely those which ardent spirits would wish to overleap ?

If the spirit of a nation be entirely directed to amusement and sensuality ; and if ever courageous quality be enervated in order to destroy thought ; who is to defend it from the attacks of hostile neighbors ? And if it escape from being conquered by a hostile power ; yet every vice would find an easy admittance, because there would exist among men nothing but the interest of pleasure, and, of course, that of money ; and among all the springs of human actions, there is none more base or contemptible.

If all were to be inspired with the love of war ; perhaps the contempt of thought might be revived, but the nation would be subjected to all the evils of feudalism ; and after all, their hopes would be deceived : for when a strong impulse is given to the mind, it is very difficult to put a stop to its progress. Heroic valor, that quality which produces a new enthusiasm, and combines all that can strike the imagination or intoxicate the mind ;—that spirit of war, which you call to the assistance of despotism, will inspire the love of

glory; and the love of glory will soon become the most formidable enemy to despotism.

The most remarkable words, and the most brilliant discourses, have been pronounced on the eve of battle, in the midst of dangers, under those perilous circumstances which, by elevating the courageous man, develop at once all his powers. This eloquence of the field would soon be imitated in civil contests: and when generous sentiments, of whatever nature they may be, are expressed without control; eloquence, this talent which appears so easy to stifle, because it is so rarely attained, revives, develops itself, and at length seizes on every subject of importance.

Wherever there has existed any wise institution, whether for the amendment of administration, for the security of liberty, the toleration of religion, or to excite the courage and pride of the nation, the progress of knowledge has immediately become visible: it is only by slavery, and the most absolute debasement, that it can be totally subdued. The earthquakes of Calabria, the plagues of Turkey, and the continual snows of Russia and Kamischatka, and every scourge of nature, are the real allies of that system which militates against the development of the faculties of man: for every misfortune, and every vice, must be invoked before a final stop could be put to the progress of knowledge.

Every thing that is said for or against knowledge, resembles the advantages and conveniences that may be attributed to life; if it were possible for men to enjoy that sort of repose which nature has bestowed on the animal creation, it might perhaps be counted a blessing, as the faculty of suffering would be greatly diminished. But man must be incessantly tormented, before it would be possible to bring him to this state, from which he is by nature excited to escape: to put a final stop to that inclination, he must be precipitated by affliction into brutishness and stupidity. But there is a point on which the enemies as well as the partisans of knowledge ought equally to agree, if they are the friends of humanity; which is the impossibility of restraining the natural bent of the human mind, without plunging it into calamities a thousand times more fatal than those which might arise from the progress of knowledge.

But on the contrary, if the advancement of knowledge is conducted to wise ends and purposes, it is an endless source of enjoyment; if the greater part of mankind have felt the need of a resting-place beyond this world; a something to appeal to in the time of trouble; ought there not to be, even in this world, a decisive principle betwixt those opinions which have no connection with morality, and upon which it has no power? Philosophical truths may be said to acquire the same empire over enlightened minds, who admit them as virtues: upon that of an honest man those truths are a source of emulation independent of circumstances; a consolation in adversity, that does not submit happiness to circumstances. If the road to the perfection of human faculties were not imperiously traced out, we should incessantly observe the predominant opinions of each day consumed in calculations to discover the actual advantages of resolution: we should also observe them consumed with regret, if the effects of that resolution did not tend to immediate utility. In this situation, what ascendancy could a man acquire over himself but what could be base and degrading to reason? What is man, when he submits to follow the passions of man; if he does not search after truth for its own sake; if he does not strive to attain the elevation of ideas and sentiments? There is a bright inducement in every career, which an ardent mind springs forward to attain: to warriors, it is glory; to men of thought, liberty; and to men of sensibility, it is a God.

These movements of enthusiasm must not be extinguished; no kind of exaltation should be diminished; the end and aim of legislation should be to unite what

is great and good in one career, to what is equally so in another; it should moderate ambition by glory, and liberty by virtue: it should direct knowledge by reasoning, and submit reasoning to humanity: and assemble in the same focus all that is useful in nature, great and good in sentiments, and the most efficacious faculties, in order to combine all the powers of the mind instead of reducing it to the necessity of combating its own developments; to chain down a passion not by virtue, but by a contrary passion; to oppose evil to evil, when all might be united, all might be reduced to perfect harmony by the single sentiment of morality.

What an inestimable gift of heaven is morality! It is through this blessing that we are enabled to understand and appreciate the beauties of nature; it is that alone which adds stability to the gifts of life. What we admire in great men, is always virtue in the form of glory; it is true that many have been guilty of criminal actions; and mediocrity, which confounds every thing, is persuaded that the destiny of a man of genius is illustrated even by the crimes he commits: but if we were to examine into the cause of our admiration, we should always perceive that it was the moral from which it was derived. But from the imperfections to which human nature is condemned, great and generous qualities are too apt to make us forget any dreadful excesses, provided the character or grandeur still remains impressed upon the person guilty of those excesses; if the virtues are felt through the passions; and if, in short, we feel that we may confide in those extraordinary men who, often blamed and often feared, are nevertheless faithful to some noble ideas, and were never known to betray misfortune or retire from danger. Yes, I dare maintain, that all is morality in the sources of enthusiasm; military courage is the sacrifice of self; the love of glory is the exalted thirst after esteem; and the exercise of great faculties in the happiness of the human species; for it is only in doing good that thoughts find a sufficient space for action.

Let us call to mind all the illustrious names which have been transmitted to us through revolving centuries: and we shall find that there is not a single character, of which history does not record at least one virtue. Morality and knowledge are mutually useful to each other; the more our thoughts are elevated, the more shame we feel for having been made to believe that there could exist any wisdom in what was immoral, or a grandeur in those resolutions of which wisdom was not the object. When the circle of relations is enlarged, morality becomes a talent, and then a genius, and afterwards the sublimity of reason and character. Doubtless, no one can promise himself to walk in this noble career without stumbling: but what every man owes to himself, and to the human species, is to direct in the best manner the means in his power, and to invoke all those of others, in order to repeat to mankind, that the depth of reason and profundity of morality are two qualities that are inseparable; and that, so far from being obliged by destiny to make a choice betwixt genius and virtue, those talents which venture forth without his guide, are successively overturned in a thousand different ways. Neither is it true, that morality is more steady and lasting among men of little knowledge: probity, unaccompanied by superior talents, may suffice to direct men in the ordinary offices of life; but in places of eminence, real knowledge is the surest guarantee of morality. We are generally deceived with regard to the wisdom of great and political conceptions: can the art of deceiving be called wisdom? or the art of tormenting individuals and nations? Can it be called wisdom to regulate a fortune according to the interests of personal avidity? What can possibly arise from all those efforts, but often a reverse, and always an internal regret? But the wisdom which is really remarkable, and the intelligence which is truly enlightened, shine in the man who chooses

virtue, and knows how to put it into practice ; to whom truth is the power of government, and generosity his main strength. In this light the great men of antiquity are described : they ennobled, they elevated the nation, who were desirous of following their example, and their contemporaries trusted in virtue : these are the signs by which a transcendent wisdom is to be known, the formation of which demands the most important of all combinations, namely, that of knowledge and morality.

It has been my wish to comprise in this work every motive that can inspire a love for the progress of knowledge : to give convincing proofs of what is necessary to that progress ; and, of course, to engage every virtuous mind to direct towards it that irresistible force, the source of which is to be found in moral nature, as the principles of motion are contained in physical nature. Nevertheless, I must own that in every page of this work, where there appears that love of philosophy and liberty, which neither their friends nor their enemies have been able to stifle in my bosom, I tremble through fear, lest an unjust and perfidious interpretation should represent me as indifferent to those crimes which I detest, and those misfortunes which I have alleviated with all the power that could belong to a mind void of cunning, and a heart without disguise. Some can brave malevolence, while others oppose calumny with indifference or disdain ; but for myself, I cannot boast of such courage : I cannot say to those who accuse me unjustly, that they do not disturb the tranquillity of my life. No, I cannot say it ; and whether I disarm or excite injustice by thus avowing its power over my happiness, I shall not affect a strength of mind which every day of my life would tend to contradict. I cannot comprehend what kind of characters those have received from heaven, who have no desire for the suffrage of mankind ; whose hearts are not dilated by a look of benevolence ; and who, when vexed by hatred and injustice, are not long before they can acquire sufficient strength of mind to treat it with contempt.

Nevertheless, this weakness of heart ought not to divert the judgment which is carried to general objects : we must brave the pain to which we expose ourselves in expressing them. Man can never usefully develop any principle of which they are not entirely persuaded themselves. The opinions which we would wish to sustain against our better judgment, cannot be examined by analysis, nor animated by expression : the more natural the reason, the more incapable it is of supporting itself when the prop of conviction is wanting. We should then, if it were possible, divest ourselves of those painful fears which destroy the independence of meditation, and confide our lives to morality, our happiness to those we love, and our thoughts to time—to time which is ever the faithful ally to conscience and truth.

What a melancholy appeal, nevertheless, for those minds who stand in need of obtaining each day the constant approbation of those who surround them ! Ah ! how happy were they ten years back, when entering into the world relying with full confidence on their own strength, on the friendship that was offered them, and on life itself, which had not as yet belied its promises ;—they did not then meet with parties of injustice, envenomed hatred, nor rivals, nor jealousy ; all then was delirium and hope ! But in ten years after, the route of existence is already traced out ; the opinions which have appeared, have jostled against interest, passions, and sentiments ; and reason and thought, intimidated by the tumult, no longer dare to force themselves into the presence of those irritated judges. Is it possible that the imagination can resist the crowd of painful recollections which lay siege to it every moment !

Reflection, it is true, may predominate ; but I much fear it will be impossible to preserve that character of youth when the heart is ever open to friendship, and the amiable candor of a mind that has never known disappointment, which gives a gloss to style, however imperfect it may be, by the sensibility and confidence of the expressions.

I, however, present this book, such as it is, to the public : when one has ceased to be unknown, it is better to give a true idea of oneself, than to trust to the perfidious hazard of calumnious inventions. But it may be that one might wish, even at the expense of the remaining half of life, one had never entered the career of letters, and the publicity by which one is followed ! How delightful are the first steps that are taken in the hopes of acquiring reputation ; what satisfaction to hear our name recited, to obtain a rank in opinion, to be distinguished among the multitude ! But alas ! when we are arrived at this envied height ; what terror takes possession of the mind, what a frightful solitude surrounds us ! We then wish, but in vain, to re-enter our wonted associations : but the time is past. Nothing is so easy as to lose the small portion of fame we may have acquired ; but it is not so easy a matter to obtain that benevolent reception which is accorded with pleasure to an obscure individual.

Of how much importance is the first impulse given to our destiny, as on that depends the happiness of our lives ! It is to no purpose that tastes are modified, inclinations are changed as well as characters : we are then forced to remain the same, because it is believed that we are so. What then remains, but to obtain new successes, since we are still hated for those that are past ! we are condemned to drag the chain of recollection of our first years, of the judgment which has been passed upon us, and, in fine, of our existence,—not such as it is in reality, but such as it is supposed to be.

Oh ! life of misery ! of tenfold misery ! which perhaps drives from us beings whom we should have loved, and who might have attached themselves to us, had not those affections which are nourished by serenity and silence, been frightened away by vain reports ! And yet we are compelled to follow this course of life, such as it is formed, since the first lines have been traced out by the imprudence of youth, and to try to find in those affections which still remain, and in the pleasures of thought, a balm to heal the wounds of the heart.

I am fully sensible how much I subject myself to blame for thus mixing the affections of the heart with the general ideas contained in this work : but it is impossible to separate the ideas from the sentiments : the affections incite us to reflection : the affections alone can give a rapid and profound penetration to the mind. Our opinions on every subject are modified by our affections. Such a work pleases, because it is analogous to some misfortunes we have ourselves experienced, or recalls to the mind some recollection that steals imperceptibly on our attention. But above all, some writings are admired, because they move every moral power. But cold and phlegmatic characters only wish to be presented with the discoveries of reason, without joining those movements of regret and those wanderings of reflection, which can never excite the smallest interest in them. I resign myself to their criticism : for how is it possible I can avoid it ! By what means can a distinction be made betwixt the talents and the mind ? How can we set aside what we feel, when we trace what we think ? how impose silence on those sentiments which live in us, without losing any of the ideas which those sentiments have inspired ? What kind of writings would result from these continual combats ! Had we not better yield to all the faults which may arise from the irregularities of nature !

# REFLECTIONS ON SUICIDE.

BY MADAME DE STAEL.

TO HIS HIGHNESS THE PRINCE ROYAL OF SWEDEN.

STOCKHOLM, DECEMBER, 1812.

MY LORD,

I wrote these Reflections on Suicide, at a time when misfortune rendered the solace of meditation necessary to sustain me. Near you, my lord, my troubles have been alleviated; my children and I, like the shepherds of Arabia, when they see a storm approaching, have sought shelter in the shade of the laurel. You, my lord, have ever considered death only in the light of devotion to your country; your mind has never been touched by the mortification which sometimes afflicts those who believe themselves useless upon earth. But to your superior mind no philosophical subject is strange; and your views are taken from so great an elevation that nothing can escape you. I have ever until now dedicated my works to the memory of my father but I have requested of you, my lord, the honor of doing you homage, because your public life is an exhibition to the world of sterling virtues which alone deserve the admiration of reflecting minds.

Intrepidity personally distinguishes you amidst the brave; but this intrepidity is directed by a feeling not less sublime; the blood of the warrior, the tears of the poor, even the cares of the unfortunate are objects of your watchful humanity. You dread the sufferings of your fellow creatures, and the exalted station in which you are placed will never be able to banish sympathy from your heart. A Frenchman said of you, my lord, that to 'the chivalry of republicanism you united the chivalry of royalty:' in truth generosity, in whatever manner it can be displayed, appears to be natural to you.

In your intercourse with the world, you never impose restraint, by factitious formality, upon the minds of those who surround you. You might, if I may be allowed the expression, gain the hearts of a whole nation, one by one, if each individual of which it is composed, had but the happiness of a few minutes' conversation with you; combined with this affability, so full of grace, your manly energy attaches to you all heroic characters.

The Swedish nation, formerly so celebrated for its exploits, and which still preserves its early reputation, cherishes in you the presage of its glory. You respect the rights of this nation, both from inclination and duty; and we have beheld you under many trying circumstances, as firm in supporting the constitutional barriers, as others are impatient of their restraint.

Duty never seems to you a restraint, but a support; and it is thus that your habitual deference for the experienced wisdom of the king gives a new lustre to the power he confides to you.

Pursue, my lord, the career which offers to you so fine a futurity, and you will teach the world anew, what it seems to have forgotten, that the most enlightened wisdom sheds a glory on morality, and that the greatest heroes, far from despising, believe themselves superior to their fellow-men, only by the sacrifices which they make to them.

I am with respect, my lord,  
Your royal highness'  
most humble, and obedient servant,  
NECKER.

Baroness de Stael-Holstein.

# REFLECTIONS

ON

## S U I C I D E .

I would impart consolation to the afflicted; the children of prosperity are instructed by their own experience only, and to them general reflections on most subjects appear useless: but it is not thus with the wretched; reflection is their best asylum, since separated by adversity from the distractions of the world, they fly to self-examination, and endeavor, like the invalid on the couch of pain, to find every alleviation of suffering.

Excess of misery gives birth to the idea of suicide, and this subject cannot be too thoroughly investigated: it involves the whole moral organization of man, I will endeavor to throw some new light upon the motives which lead to this action, as well as on those which prevent its perpetration I will examine the subject without prejudice or pride. We ought not to be offended with those who are so wretched as to be unable to support the burden of existence, nor should we applaud those who sink under its weight, since, to sustain it, would be a greater proof of their moral strength.\*

The opponents of suicide, feeling themselves on the ground of duty and reason, too often employ, in support of their arguments, an intolerant manner, offensive to their adversaries; and also frequently mingle unjust invective against enthusiasm, generally, with their well-merited reprobation of an unjustifiable action. It appears to me, on the contrary, that we can easily demonstrate from the principles themselves of true enthusiasm, or, in other words, from the love of pure morality, how far resignation to destiny is superior to rebellion against it.

I propose to present the question of suicide in three different points of view: I shall first examine, 'what is the influence of suffering on the mind;' secondly, I shall show, 'what are the laws which the Christian religion imposes on us in relation to suicide;' and thirdly, I shall consider 'in what consists the greatest moral dignity of man in this world.'

### SECTION I.

#### WHAT IS THE INFLUENCE OF SUFFERING ON THE MIND?

We cannot dissemble that there is in the effect of impressions, produced by grief as much difference be-

*In my work 'On the Influence of the Passions' I have applauded suicide, and I have ever since repented of that inconsiderate expression. I was then in all the pride and vivacity of early youth; but of what use is life, without the hope of improvement?*

tween individuals, as can exist relatively with genius and character. Not only the circumstances, but the manner of feeling them, differ so essentially, that people otherwise estimable may misunderstand each other in this respect; and yet, of all the limits of the understanding, the most grievous is that which prevents us from comprehending one another.

It appears to me that happiness consists in a destiny harmonizing with our faculties. Our desires are the offspring of the moment, and often are of fatal consequence to us; but our faculties are permanent, and their necessities are unceasing: hence the conquest of the world may have been as necessary to Alexander, as the possession of a cottage to a shepherd. It does not follow, however, that the human race should have served but as nourishment to the gigantic faculties of Alexander; but it may be admitted that, according to the constitution of his nature, there were no other means of happiness for him.

A capacity to love, an activity of mind, a value attached to opinion, are the sources of happiness to some and altogether productive of infelicity to others. The inflexible law of duty is the same for all, but moral strength is purely individual; and in forming an opinion of the happiness or unhappiness of those who are constituted differently from ourselves, a profound knowledge of the human heart is essential to the philosophical and just conclusion.

It appears to me then that we should never dispute the feelings of others; counsel can only operate on conduct, the laws of religion and virtue providing alike for all situations; but the causes of misery, and its intensity, vary equally with circumstances and individuals. We might as well attempt to count the waves of the sea, as to analyze the combinations of destiny and character. Conscience alone exists within us as a pure and unchangeable being, from whom we can all obtain what we all most need, the repose of the soul. The greater part of men resemble each other, not so much in their actions as in their powers, and no one capable of reflection will deny, that, in committing sins against morality, we always feel we might have avoided them. If then we admit that it is part of our condition here to endure affliction, we cannot excuse ourselves, either by the weight of this affliction, or by the acuteness of the feeling which it produces. We all have within us the means of performing our duty; and what is most wonderful in moral as well as in physical nature, is, how equally and universally what is necessary to us is disturbed, while what is superfluous is diversified in a thousand ways.

Physical and moral pain are one and the same thing in their effect upon the mind ; for corporeal and mental affliction are both productive of pain ; but the one destroys the body, while the other regenerates the soul.

It is not enough to believe with the stoics that 'pain is not an evil,' to submit to it with resignation. We must be convinced that it is a blessing. The least evil would be insupportable, if we considered it as purely accidental ; individual irritability governing sensibility, there would be no more justice in blaming him who should destroy himself on account of the prick of a pin, than for an attack of the gout ; for some slight difficulty, than for a real calamity. The smallest sensation of pain may excite rebellious dispositions in the mind, if it tend not towards its perfection ; for there is more injustice in a light evil, if unnecessary, than in the heaviest affliction, if it have a noble end in view.

It is not necessary here to recur to the grand metaphysical question of the origin of evil, in the discussion of which philosophers have so vainly interested themselves. We can have no conception of free-will without admitting the possibility of evil ; we can have no conception of virtue without free-will ; nor of life eternal, without virtue ;—this chain, the first link of which is, at the same time, incomprehensible and indispensable, ought to be considered as the condition of our being. If reflection and feeling lead us to believe that there is ever, in the ways of providence, a latent or apparent justice, we cannot consider suffering as either accidental or arbitrary. If we believe that the deity could endow us with unlimited faculties or powers, and that the infinite were thus transferable, we should have as much right to complain of some happiness withheld, as of some trouble imposed. Why should not man as well be incensed at not having always existed, as that he must cease to exist ? In short, on what ground do his complaints rest ? Is it against the system of the universe that he rebels, or against the part allotted to him in a system, subject to immutable laws ? Affliction is one of the essential elements of the means of happiness ; and it is impossible to form a conception of the one without the other. The vivacity of our desires is always in proportion to the difficulties with which they have to contend ; the height of our enjoyments, to the fear of losing them ; the strength of our affections, to the dangers which menace the objects of our regard. In a word, the Gordian knot of pleasure and of pain can only be severed by the stroke that terminates existence. Let us submit, say the unfortunate, to the balance of good and evil which belongs to the ordinary course of events ; but when we are treated as enemies by destiny we have a right to endeavor to escape its malignity : and yet the regulator which determines the result of this balance is entirely within ourselves : the same sort of life, which reduces one to despair, would fill another with joy, who is placed in a sphere of less elevated hopes. This reflection is not incompatible with what I have said as to the respect we owe to the various modes of feeling : without doubt, the happiness of one may not accord with the character of another ; but resignation belongs equally to all. If there are in physical nature two opposite powers, impulse and gravity, which are the causes of the motion of the earth, it may also be asserted that the desire of action, and the necessity of submission, volition, and resignation, are the two poles of moral being, and that the equilibrium of reason is only to be found between them.

The greater part of men can scarcely comprehend more than two powers in life, destiny, and their own will, which is of itself, they believe, sufficient to influence destiny ; and hence the general transition from irritation to pride. When they are in a state of irritation, they inveigh against destiny, as children beat the table against which they hurt themselves ; and when they are satisfied with the events of life, they attribute

them entirely to themselves, deriving a degree of complacency from the means they have employed to direct them, and considering these means as the only source of their felicity. Both these modes of judging are erroneous.

The will of man acts commonly, it is true, in concurrence with destiny ; but when this destiny is the result of necessity, that is to say, when it is unalterable, it becomes the manifestation of the designs of providence towards us. A man of genius has observed that 'necessity invigorates.' We must rise to a great elevation of thought to adopt this expression in its full extent ; but it is certain that we should always have a sort of respect for destiny. It is a power which, sooner or later, unforeseen or anticipated, seizes on a certain epoch of life and determines the course of it ; but far from destiny being blind, as we are pleased to imagine it, we have reason to believe that it comprehends us thoroughly, for it scarcely ever fails to assail our inmost weaknesses. It is the secret tribunal which pronounces judgment on us, and when it may appear unjust, perhaps we alone can tell what it would intend and what it would exact.

There is no doubt of our coming forth, sensibly improved, from the trials of adversity, when we submit to them with a becoming fortitude. The greatest faculties of the soul are developed only by suffering, and this purification of ourselves restores us, after a time, to happiness ; for the circle closes up again, and carries us back to those days of innocence which preceded our faults. We then abandon virtue when we fly to suicide as a refuge from misfortune ; we reject the enjoyments that virtue would bestow by enabling us to triumph over our distresses. The disciples of Plato said that 'the soul had need of a certain period of sojournment upon earth to become purified from guilty passions.' We should, in fact, believe that the end of life is properly to renounce it. Physical nature accomplishes this work by destruction, and moral nature by sacrifice. Human existence, rightly conceived, is but the abdication of personality to gain admission into universal order. Children only comprehend themselves, young people each other and the friends who are a part of themselves ; but when the presages of decay appear, we must seek consolation in general reflections, or abandon ourselves to all the terrors which the latter part of life presents ; for the unfortunate or fortunate circumstances of each individual are of little consequence in comparison with the inflexible laws of nature. Old age and death, much more than our peculiar distresses, should fill us with despair ; but we readily submit to an universal condition, and yet rebel against our own portion, without reflecting that the universal condition is found in each lot, and that the distinction is more apparent than real.

In treating of the moral dignity of man, I shall strenuously insist upon the difference which exists between suicide and self-devotion, that is to say, between the sacrifice of ourselves to others, or which is the same thing, to virtue ; and the renunciation of existence because it is a burden to us. The motives which lead to this act change entirely the nature of it ; for when we abdicate life in order to do good to others, we immolate, if I may use the expression, our body to our soul, whilst, when we destroy ourselves from impatience under misfortune, we sacrifice almost always our conscience to our passions.

It is nevertheless wrong to contend that suicide is an act of cowardice : this strained assertion never convinced any one ; but we ought here to distinguish between courage and fortitude. The act of suicide implies contempt of death, but to be unable to endure suffering shows a want of fortitude. A species of frenzy is necessary to subdue in us the instinct of self-preservation, when no religious feeling demands the sacrifice. The generosity of those who have made

cessfully endeavored to destroy themselves have not renewed the attempt. because there is in suicide, as in every extravagant act of the will, a certain degree of folly, which is appeased when it nearly accomplishes the end it had in view. Unhappiness is scarcely ever absolute; its associations with our recollections or our hopes, often constitutes the greater part of it; and when we experience a lively check, our affliction frequently presents itself to our imagination under a very different aspect.

Observe, after a period of ten years, a person who has sustained some great privation, of whatever nature it may be, and you will find that he suffers and enjoys from other causes than those from which ten years ago his misery was derived. It does not, therefore, follow that he is restored to happiness; but hope and fear have changed their course in him; and of the activity of these two passions moral life is composed.

There is one cause of suicide which interests the hearts of most women: it is love. The spell of this passion is no doubt the principal cause of the errors we commit in our judgment on the question of self-destruction. We are willing that love should subjugate the highest powers of the soul, and that nothing should be beyond his empire. All sorts of enthusiasm having encountered the attacks of mocking incredulity, romances have still maintained the delusion of sentiment in those countries of the world, to which good faith has retired: but of all the miseries of love there is but one, it appears to me, which should subdue the energy of the soul; it is the death of the object we love and by whom we are beloved.

An inward horror pervades our nature when the heart with which our existence was blended rests cold in the tomb. This affliction, the only one perhaps which surpasses the strength god has given us to resist suffering, has nevertheless been considered by several moralists as easier to be supported than those in which offended pride is in any respect mingled. In fact, in the misery which is produced by the infidelity of the object of our love, though the heart receives the wound, self-love instills its poisons. Without doubt also, a sentiment nobler than self-love rends our hearts when we are obliged to relinquish the esteem we had conceived for the first object of our affections; when there remains no more of an enthusiasm so profound, than the remembrance of the delusive appearances which gave birth to it. We must, however, in strictness urge, that, in an intimate and sincere union, such as ought to exist between true and pure beings, from the moment that either is unfaithful, or that either has deceived, he becomes unworthy of the sentiment he had inspired. I do not wish by this reasoning to imitate those pedants who reduce the troubles of life to syllogisms. We suffer in a thousand ways, we suffer from various, opposite and contending feelings; and no one has a right to contest the causes of our miseries: but in all the sufferings of the soul, in which self-love has its share, it is as unwise as reprehensible to seek our own destruction: for all that partakes of vanity is necessarily fleeting and we must not accord to that which is fleeting the right to precipitate us into eternity.

A misfortune entirely free from all emotion of pride is then the only one which should lead to suicide; but for the very reason that such a misfortune originates entirely in sensibility, religion can deprive it of its bitterness. Providence, which desires not that the wounds of the human soul should be without a cure, brings relief to him whom he has afflicted beyond his strength. Often, at such a time, the wings of the angel of peace overshadow our dejected heads, and who can say that this angel is not the very object of our regret! who can say that, touched by our tears, it has not obtained from heaven the power of watching over us!

*The pains of sensibility, which self-love embitters,*

are necessarily moderated by time; and those of an affecting nature, without any mixture of the emotion of pride, inspire a religious disposition, which leads the soul to resignation. The most frequent causes of suicide in modern times are ruin and dishonor. A reverse of fortune, as society is constituted, produces a most acute unhappiness, which multiplies itself in a thousand different ways. The most cruel of all, however, is the loss of the rank we occupied in the world. Imagination has as much to do with the past, as with the future, and we form with our possessions an alliance, whose rupture is most grievous; but, after a time, a new situation presents a new perspective to almost all men. Happiness is so composed of relative sensations, that it is not things in themselves, but their connection with yesterday and to-morrow, which affects the imagination. If destiny or the menaces of a tyrant have led a man to apprehend a certain degree of unhappiness, and he learns that he is to be spared the half of what he dreaded, his impressions will be very different from those he would have experienced, if he had not suffered so great a terror. Destiny has almost always much to do in the composition of our miseries; we may say that he also sometimes repents as well as other sovereigns of causing too much evil.

Opinion exercises over most individuals a degree of influence whose power it is difficult to diminish: the words, 'I am dishonored,' affect the whole mind of a social being, and it is not possible to avoid pitying him who sinks under the weight of this misfortune; for, since he feels it so bitterly, it is, in all probability, deserved: but yet we must range the causes of dishonor in two principal classes; those which are derived from faults with which our conscience reproaches us; and those which originate in involuntary error and are in no wise criminal.

Repentance is necessarily connected with our ideas of divine justice, for if we did not regulate our actions by this supreme standard of equity, we should experience in life nothing but discontent. We must consider existence in two points of view; either as a game, the gain or loss of which consists in the advantages of this world; or as a noviciate for immortality. If we regard it as a game, we shall be able to trace in our own conduct only the consequences of true or false reasoning; if we have the life to come in view, it is intention only to which our conscience clings. The man whose views are limited to the interests of this world may suffer discontent, but repentance belongs only to the religious man; and being such, he necessarily feels that expiation is the first duty, and that conscience commands us to endure the consequences of our transgressions, to the end that we may repair them, if possible, by doing good. Merited dishonor is then, to the religious man, a just punishment, from which he believes he has no right to fly; for, although, among human actions, there may be many more perverse than suicide, there is not one which seems so formally to deprive us of the protection of god.

Our passions lead us to many culpable actions which have happiness for their end; but, in suicide, there is a renunciation of all succor from above, that cannot be reconciled with any pious disposition.

He who is truly affected by repentance will exclaim, with the prodigal son: 'I will arise, and go to my father, and will say unto him, father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.' With this affecting resignation would a religious being express himself, for the more criminal he believes himself to be, the less would he arrogate to himself the right to quit life, since he has not used the gift as the bestower of it exacts. As for those guilty beings who do not believe in a future existence, and who have lost their consequence in this world, suicide, according to their manner of thinking, has no other inconvenience than to deprive them of the happy

chances that might yet remain for them, and each individual can estimate these chances as he chooses, from his calculation of probabilities.

I believe we may affirm that unmerited dishonor is never of long duration. The influence of truth on the public is such, that patience only is requisite to restore us to our station. Time has something sacred in it, and seems to act independently of the events it embraces. It is a support for the weak and unfortunate, and, in fact, is one of those mysterious ways by which the deity manifests himself to us. The world, which is in most respects so different a thing from the individual, the world, which is a sensible being, although composed of so many stupid ones, the world, which is liberal, although follies without number are committed by those who make a part of it, the world always concludes by returning to justice, as soon as predominating and momentary circumstances have disappeared. 'In patience possess ye your souls,' says the gospel, and this counsel of piety is also that of reason. When we reflect on the holy writings, we find in them an admirable combination of the best precepts for conducting ourselves with success in this world, and often also the best means of obtaining it. Physical suffering, incurable infirmity, in short, all such miseries as are inseparable from corporeal existence, would seem to constitute one of the most plausible causes of suicide; and yet, scarcely ever, particularly among the moderns, does this species of misery occasion it. Miseries which are in the ordinary course of events may overcome us, but do not excite us to rebel against our condition. It is essential that irritation should be mingled with our feelings before we can be enraged against destiny, and wish to liberate ourselves from its evils, or revenge ourselves against it, as an oppressor. There is a singular kind of error in the manner in which most men consider their destiny. This error has so much influence on the impressions of the mind, that we cannot too often contemplate it under its various aspects. Indeed, a community of suffering is sufficient to make us resigned to the most distressing events, and we find injustice only in those afflictions which are peculiarly our own. And yet, are not these varieties, as well as these resemblances, for the most part counterbalanced? and are they not all, I repeat it, equally comprised in the laws of nature? I shall not dwell upon the common consolations that may be derived from the hope of a change in our circumstances; there are some afflictions which are not susceptible of this sort of comfort: but I believe we may boldly affirm, that all who have resorted to an active and steady employment have found an alleviation of their distress. There is an object in all occupations, and it is an object that man constantly requires. Our faculties devour us, like the vulture of Prometheus, when they have no external cause of action, and employment exercises and directs these faculties: in short, when we possess imagination, and most people in sorrow have a great deal, we can always find renovated pleasure in the master-pieces of the human mind, either as amateurs or artists. A celebrated woman has remarked that 'ennui is mingled in all our distresses,' and this reflection is full of profundity. True ennui, that of active minds, is the absence of all interest in what surrounds us, combined with faculties, which render this interest essential to us; it is thirst without the possibility of quenching it. Tantalus is a just image of the soul in this state. Occupation gives a zest to existence, and the fine arts contain, at the same time, the originality of particular objects, and the grandeur of universal ideas. They preserve our relation with nature; we might love her without the aid of these charming mediators, but they teach us the better to appreciate her.

*We must not disdain, in whatever misery we may be plunged, the primitive gifts of our creator, life and nature. A social being places too much importance upon*

the tissue of circumstances of which his individual history is composed. Existence is in itself a marvelous thing; the happiness of the savage is derived from it alone; sick people often pray for nothing else; the prisoner considers liberty as the supreme good; the blind man would willingly give all he possessed for the blessing of sight; the climates of the south, which give life to colors, and develop perfumes, produce an undefinable impression; the consolations of philosophy have less empire over us than the enjoyments we derive from the spectacle of heaven and earth. Among our means of happiness then the power of reflection is most valuable. We are so contracted in ourselves, so many things agitate and wound us, that we have constantly need to plunge into this boundless sea of thoughts, where we must, as in the Styx, become invulnerable, or altogether resigned.

No one will venture to say that we can endure every calamity we are subjected to in this world, nor will any one dare to place such confidence in his own strength as to make this assertion. There are but few beings endowed with such superior faculties that despair has not reached them more than once; and life appears but as a protracted shipwreck, the fragments of which are friendship, love and glory. The borders of the stream of time are covered with them; but if we have preserved the internal harmony of the soul, we may yet hold communion with the works of the deity.

The mercy of heaven, the stillness of death, the beauty of the universe, which was not designed to show man his own insignificance, but as an earnest of better days; some noble thoughts, always the same; are like the harmony of creation, and restore us to tranquillity when we are accustomed to comprehend them. From these sources the hero and the poet draw their inspirations; why then would not some drops from the cup, which elevates them above humanity, be salutary for all?

We accuse destiny of malignity because its blows are always aimed at the tenderest part of us. This is not attributable to the malignity of destiny but to the impetuosity of our desires, which precipitates us against the obstacles we encounter, as we run deeper upon the sword of our adversary in the ardor of combat: and besides, the instruction we should receive from misfortune necessarily applies to that part of our character which stands most in need of reproof. We cannot admit the belief of a god without supposing that he directs destiny in its influence upon men: we cannot then consider this destiny as a blind power; it remains to be considered whether he who governs it has given to man the liberty of submitting to or flying from it. I shall examine this in the second part of these reflections.

## SECTION II.

WHAT ARE THE LAWS WHICH THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION IMPOSES ON US, IN RELATION TO SUICIDE?

When the ancient man of sorrows, Job, was stricken with every evil, when he had lost his fortune and his children, and when frightful physical afflictions made him suffer a thousand deaths, his wife advised him to renounce life. 'Curse god,' said she, 'and die.'—'What,' replied he, 'I have received good at the hand of god, and shall I not receive evil?' And in whatever depth of despair he was plunged, he was resigned to his fate, and his patience was rewarded. It is supposed that Job preceded Moses; he existed, at least, long before the coming of Jesus Christ, and at a time when the hope of the soul's immortality was not yet assured to mankind. What would he then have thought at the present time? We see in the bible, men, we



as Samson and the Maccabees, who devoted themselves to death, to accomplish a design they believed to be noble and salutary; but in no part do we find examples of suicide, of which disgust to life or its troubles is the only cause; in no part has that species of suicide, which is only a desertion from destiny, been considered as possible. It has been frequently asserted, that there is no passage in the gospel which indicates a formal disapprobation of this act. Jesus Christ, in his discourses, rather ascends to the principles of action than enters into a particular application of the law; but is it not enough, that the general spirit of the gospel tends to hallow resignation?

'Blessed are they that mourn,' said Jesus Christ, 'for they shall be comforted. If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, for my sake.' Jesus Christ every where announces that his mission is, to teach man that the design of misfortune is the purification of the soul, and that celestial happiness is obtained by pious endurance of our miseries on earth. The interpretation of the doubtful meaning of affliction, is the special intention of the doctrine of Jesus Christ.

We find many good things respecting social morality in the Hebrew prophets and in the Pagan philosophers; but it was to teach charity, patience, and faith, that Jesus Christ descended upon earth; and these three virtues all alike tend to the relief of the unhappy. The first, charity, teaches us our duty towards them; the second, patience, teaches them to what consolations they ought to have recourse, and the third faith, announces to them their recompense. Most of the precepts of the gospel would want foundation if suicide were permitted; for, from misfortune we learn the necessity of appealing to heaven, and the insufficiency of the goods of this world is what, above all, renders another life necessary.

It is seldom that individuals, in the intoxication of prosperity, preserve a holy respect for sacred things. The allurements of this world are so brilliant as to darken all other joys, even the glory of a future existence. A German philosopher, disputing with his friends, once said, 'To obtain such a thing, I would give millions of years of my eternal felicity,' and he was singularly moderate in the sacrifice he offered; for temporal enjoyments have generally much more activity than religious hopes; and spiritual life, or Christianity, which is the same thing, would not exist, if sorrow dwelt not in the heart of man. Premeditated suicide is incompatible with Christian faith, because this faith rests chiefly on the different duties of resignation. With respect to suicide resulting from a moment of delirium, from an excess of despair, it is not probable the divine legislator of men had occasion to notice it among the Jews, who rarely offered examples of this sort of offence. He unceasingly combated, in the Pharisees, the vices of hypocrisy, of unbelief, and of hardness of heart. Indeed, he appears to have considered the faults of the passions as the disease of the soul, and not as its habitual state, and always to have appealed rather to the general spirit of morality than to the precepts which grow out of circumstances.

Jesus Christ constantly directed man to occupy himself with life as it has relation to immortality only. 'Then, why take ye thought for raiment,' said he, 'consider the lilies of the field, they toil not, neither do they spin; yet Solomon, in all his glory, was not arrayed like one of these.' It is not slothfulness nor indifference that Jesus Christ inculcates by this passage, but a sort of calm which would be useful even as it regards the interests of this world. Warriors call this sentiment confidence in their good fortune; religious men, the hope of divine assistance; but both the one and the other find in this internal disposition of the soul a support, which, while it enables them to form a clear-

er judgment of the circumstances of this life, at the same time affords the means of escaping from them. We believe we can obtain our emancipation from the tyranny of human events by determining to destroy ourselves if we do not attain the end of our desires. Under this idea, we consider ourselves as entirely at our own disposal; and free to relinquish life when we are no longer content with the condition of it. If the gospel accorded with this manner of thinking, we should find in it some lessons of prudence; but all those which relate to virtue would have a very limited application, for virtue consists only in the preference we give to others, that is to say, to our duty over our personal interests: now, when we renounce life, merely because we are not happy, we prefer ourselves to all the world, and become, if I may be allowed the expression, egotists in suicide.

Of all the religious arguments which have been adduced against suicide, that which has been most frequently reiterated, is that it is formally comprised in the prohibition expressed by the commandment of god: 'Thou shalt not kill.' Without doubt, this argument might also be admitted; but as it is impossible to consider the suicide in the same light with the assassin, the true point of view of this question is, that happiness not being the end of human life, man ought to aim at perfection, and consider his duties as necessarily connected with his sufferings. Marcus Aurelius said that 'there was no more crime in leaving him than a room that smokes:' certainly, if it were so, instances of suicide would be still more frequent than they are; for it is difficult, when the illusion of youth is past, to reflect on the course of things, and still to preserve our attachment to existence. We might adhere to this existence, through fear of leaving it; but if this motive alone retained us upon earth, all those who have conquered fear, by the force of military habits, all those whose imaginations are more terrified by the phantom of life than by that of death, would spare themselves their latter days, which repeat in so melancholy a tone the brilliant airs of our youth.

J. J. Rousseau, in his letter in favor of suicide, says, 'Why, if we are allowed to cut off a leg, are we not also permitted to take away our lives? Has not the will of god given us the one as well as the other?' A passage of the gospel seems to reply textually to this sophism: 'If thy right hand offend thee,' says Jesus Christ 'cut it off. If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee.' What the gospel here says, applies to temptation, and not suicide; but nevertheless it is sufficient to refute the argument of J. J. Rousseau. Man is permitted to seek a cure for all his evils; but it is forbidden him to destroy his being, or in other words, the power he has received of choosing between good and evil. He exists by this power, he ought to be regenerated by it, and to this principle of action, to which the exercise of free will entirely belongs, every thing is subordinate.

Jesus Christ, in encouraging man to endure the pains of life, repeats unceasingly the efficacy of prayer. 'Knock,' says he, and it shall be opened unto you; ask and it shall be given unto you.' But the hopes he presents relate not to the events of this life; it is the disposition of the soul upon which prayer exerts the greatest influence. Peace of mind and the prosperities of the world are both alike denominated by the word happiness; and yet, no two things are so different as these sources of enjoyment. The philosophers of the eighteenth century have founded morality on the positive advantages it procures in this world, and have considered it as personal interest, well understood. Christians have fixed the centre of our greatest enjoyments in the bottom of the soul. Philosophers promise temporal benefits to those who are virtuous; they are right, in some respects; for, in the ordinary course of things, it is very probable that the blessings of this life

will accompany a course of moral conduct; but if our confidence in this should be deceived, despair would then be lawful; for, considering virtue only as a speculation, when it is unsuccessful we may abandon existence. Christianity, on the contrary, places happiness above all, in the impressions we receive from conscience. Have we not experienced, independently of religious feelings, and our internal disposition has not always agreed with our circumstances, and that we have often felt more or less happy, than we ought to be, after an examination of our situation? If the mere force of the mobility of our nature is sufficient to produce such an effect, how much more power ought the holy and secret operation of piety to have upon the soul! How often have those virtuous beings whom affliction has visited, found an unexpected calm in the bottom of their hearts! An unknown celestial music is heard in the desert, and seems to announce that the fountain will soon spring, even from the bosom of the rock.

When we have beheld Louis XVI, the purest and most respectable victim that faction could immolate, led to the scaffold, we cannot but demand what relief the hand of god stretched forth to him in the abyss of misery! Of a sudden, the voice of an angel is heard, who under the form of a minister of the church, says to him, 'Son of Saint Louis, rise to heaven! His worldly grandeur, his heavenly hopes were all united in these simple words. They uplifted him, by recalling to him his illustrious race from the debasement into which man had wished to plunge him; they invoked the shades of his ancestors, who, without doubt, already stretched forth their crowns to welcome the coming of the august saint to heaven. Perhaps, at this moment, the eye of faith made him fancy he described them. He approached the limits of time, and our calculation of its hours concerned him no longer. Who knows with what blissful emotion a single moment of tender reflection at that time filled his soul!

While the blood-stained executioner bound those hands, which has wielded the sceptre of France, the same missionary of god said to his king: 'Sire, it was thus that our lord was led to death.' What aid did he not impart to the martyr, by presenting to his view his divine model! In fact, is not the most glorious example of the sacrifice of life the basis of the Christian's belief! And does not this example mark the difference which exists between the martyr and the suicide? The martyr serves the cause of virtue, by yielding up his blood for the instruction of the world: the suicide perverts all idea of courage, and scandalizes even death itself. The martyr teaches man the power of conscience, it subdues the most powerful physical instinct; the suicide also proves the power of will, over instinct, but it is that of an unsteady charioteer, who can no longer hold the reins, but precipitates himself into the abyss, instead of conducting in safety to the goal. Indeed, in committing this terrible act, the soul is wrought to a pitch of frenzy, which concentrates, in an instant, an eternity of pain.

The last scene of the life of Jesus Christ appears destined, above all, to confound those who believe they have the right to destroy themselves in order to escape misfortune. The dread of suffering seized upon him, who had voluntarily devoted himself to the death, as well as to the life of man. He prayed a long time to his father, on the mount of Olives, and his soul was exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death. 'My father,' cried he, 'if it be possible let this cup pass from me!' Three times he repeated this prayer, his countenance bathed in tears. All our pains had passed into his divine being. He feared, like us, the outrageous of man; like us, perhaps, he regretted those he had loved, his mother and his disciples; like us, and more than us, perhaps, he loved this fruitful earth, and the celestial

pleasures of an active beneficence, for which he returned thanks to his father every day. But not being able to avert the cup to which he was destined, he cried, 'Nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done, O, my father,' and replaced himself in the hands of his enemies. What more would we seek in the gospel on resignation in affliction, and the duty of supporting it with courage and patience? The resignation we obtain from religious faith is a species of moral suicide, and it is in that it so much differs from suicide, properly so called, for the renunciation of self has for its end the sacrifice of ourselves to our fellow creatures; while suicide, caused by a disgust of life, is only the bloody mourning of personal happiness. Saint Paul says, 'She that liveth in pleasure, is dead while she liveth.' In every line of the holy writings we see this great misunderstanding between the beings of time and those of eternity; the first make life consist in what the last regard as death. It is then plain that the opinion of beings of time consecrates the suicide, while that of the beings of eternity exalts the martyr: for he who grounds morality on the happiness it may produce upon earth, hates life when it does not realize its promises; whilst he who makes true felicity consist in the internal emotion, which sentiments and thoughts in communication with the deity excite, can be happy in spite of men, and, if I may use the expression, in defiance of destiny. When the experience of existence has taught us the vanity of our own strength, and the almighty power of god, it often works in the soul a sort of regeneration, the delights of which are inexpressible.—Then it is that we become accustomed to judge ourselves, as we judge of others; to place our conscience as a third person between our personal interests and those of our adversaries; we are passive as to our destiny, certain that we cannot direct it; we are passive also as regards our self-love, certain that it is not ourselves but the world that casts our character: we are passive, in fine, as to that hardest of all human trials, the wrongs and injuries of friendship; whether it be by recollection of our own imperfections, or by confiding to the tomb of the being who has best loved us our most secret thoughts; or, finally, by raising towards heaven the sensibility it has bestowed upon us. How great is the difference between this religious denial of terrestrial strife, and the frenzy which leads to suicide as a refuge from suffering. The renunciation of ourselves is in every respect opposed to suicide.

Besides, how can we be assured that suicide will deliver us from the evils which pursue us! What certainty can atheists have of annihilation, or philosophers of the mode of existence nature has reserved for them? While Socrates taught to the Greeks the immortality of the soul, many of his disciples committed suicide, greedy to taste of this intellectual life, of which the confused images of paganism had not given them the idea. The emotion excited by so novel a doctrine led their ardent imaginations astray; but, can Christians, to whom the promises of a future life have been extended only in connection with menaces of punishment to the guilty, can they hope that suicide will be the means of extricating them from the troubles which overwhelm them? If the soul survive death, will not the sentiment which filled it entirely, whatever may be its nature, still make a part of it? Who among us knows what connection is established between the recollections of earth and celestial enjoyments? Is it for us to draw near, by our own resolution, to this unknown region, from which, at the same time a secret dread repulses us? How can we annihilate, by the caprice of our will, (and I denominate thus every act not founded upon duty) the work of god in us? How shall we determine our death, when we had no power over our birth? How answer for our eternal destiny, when the most trifling actions of this brief existence have often filled us with the most bitter regret? Who will dare believe himself

wiser and stronger than destiny, and venture to say to it—this is too much!

Suicide draws us from nature as well as from its author. Natural death is almost always softened by the enfeebling of our strength, and the exaltation of virtue sustains us in the sacrifice of life to our duty: but the suicide seems to spring with hostile arms beyond the borders of the tomb, and defies alone the images of horror and of darkness.

Oh! what despair is required for such an act! May pity, the most profound pity, be granted to him who is guilty of it! but, at least, let him not mingle human pride with it. Let not the wretch believe himself the more a man, for being the less a Christian, and let a reflecting being know ever where to place the true moral dignity of man.

### SECTION III.

#### OF THE MORAL DIGNITY OF MAN.

Almost every individual aims here below either at his physical well-being or at his consideration in the world, and the greater part of mankind at both united: but consideration, in the estimation of some, consists in the ascendancy which power and fortune bestow, and in that of others, in the respect which talents and virtue inspire. Those who seek riches and power are also desirous to be thought possessed of moral qualities, and above all, of superior faculties; but this last is a secondary end, which must give place to the first; for a certain depraved knowledge of the human race, teaches us, that the solid advantages of life command the interests of men still more than their esteem.

We will set aside, as foreign from our subject, those whose ambition has only power and riches for its end; but we will examine with attention in what the moral dignity of man consists; and this examination will lead us necessarily to judge the action of self-destruction under two opposite points of view; the sacrifice inspired by virtue, and the disgust which results from mistaken passions. We have opposed, in respect to religion, the martyr to the suicide; we may also, in respect to moral dignity, present the contrast of devotion to duty, with rebellion against our condition.

Devotion generally leads us rather to submit to death, than to be instrumental in bringing it upon ourselves; yet, there were among the ancients suicides from devotion. Curtis, precipitating himself to the depth of the abyss, that he might cause it to close; Cato, stabbing himself to teach the world that there still existed a soul free under Cæsar's dominion, did not destroy themselves to escape from misery; the one wished to save his country, and the other gave the universe an example whose ascendancy still continues. Cato passed the night preceding his death in reading the Phædon of Socrates, and the Phædon explicitly condemns suicide, but this great citizen knew that he did not die for himself but for the cause of liberty; and, according to circumstances, this cause may teach us to await death, like Socrates, or to be ourselves the instrument of it, like Cato.

The characteristic of the true moral dignity of man, is devotion to duty. What we do for ourselves may have a sort of grandeur which excites surprise; but admiration is only due to the sacrifice of selfish feeling, under whatever form it may appear. Elevation of soul constantly tends to free us from what is purely individual, for the purpose of uniting us to the great views of the creator of the universe. Love and reflection comfort and exalt us only by withdrawing us from all egotistical impressions. Devotion and enthusiasm infuse a purer air into our breasts. Self-love, irritation, impatience, are the enemies against which conscience obliges us to combat, and the tissue of our lives is almost entirely composed of the continual action and re-

action of internal strength against external circumstances, and of external circumstances against internal strength. Conscience is the true standard of the greatness of man, but it has only a claim, to our admiration in the generous being, who opposes duty himself, and can sacrifice himself when duty commands him to do so.

Genius and talent can produce great effects upon this earth; but when the object of their exercise is the personal ambition of him who possesses them, they no longer constitute the divine nature in man. They only serve for address, for prudence, for all those worldly qualities, the type of which is found in animals, although the perfection of them belongs to man. The paw of the fox, and the pen of him who barter his opinion for his interest, are one and the same thing in respect to moral dignity. The man of genius who serves himself at the expense of the happiness of his fellow-creatures, whatever eminent faculties he may be endowed with, acts always with regard to self; and in this respect the principle of his conduct is the same with that of animals. What distinguishes conscience from instinct is sentiment and the knowledge of duty, and duty always consists in the sacrifice of self to others. The whole problem of moral life is included in this principle; the whole dignity of the human being is in proportion to its strength, not only against death, but against the interests of existence. The other impulse, that is to say, that which overthrows the obstacles opposed to our desires, has success for its recompense, as well as its end; but it is not more wonderful to make use of our intelligence to subject others to our passions, than to employ our feet in walking, or our hands in taking, and, in the estimate of moral qualities, it is the motive of actions which alone determines their worth.

Hegesippus of Cyrene, a disciple of Aristippus, discoursed in favor of suicide as well as sensuality. He contended that man should have no object but pleasure in this world; but as it is very difficult to insure our own enjoyments, he advised death to those who could not obtain them. This doctrine is one of those by which we can best determine the motives of suicide, and it evinces the species of egotism which mingles, as I have before observed, in the very act by which we would annihilate ourselves.

A Swedish professor, named Robeck, wrote a long work upon suicide, and killed himself after having composed it: he says in his book, that we should encourage a contempt of life, even to suicide. Do not the most profligate also despise life? Every thing consists in the sentiment to which we make the sacrifice. Suicide, regarding only self, which we have carefully distinguished from the sacrifice of existence to virtue, proves but one thing in point of courage, which is, that the will of the soul overcomes physical instinct: thousands of soldiers afford constant evidence of this truth. Animals, it is said, never kill themselves. Actions, which are the result of reflection, are incompatible with their nature: they appear to be enchained by the present, ignorant of the future, and gathering only habits from the past: but as soon as their passions become roused, they brave pain, and this greatest pain which we term death; of which, without doubt, they have not the least idea. The courage of a great many men also partakes of this want of thought. Robeck was wrong in extolling the contempt of life so highly. There are two ways of sacrificing life, either because we give duty the preference, or because we give our passions this preference, in not wishing to live when we have lost the hope of happiness. This last sentiment cannot merit esteem: but to fortify ourselves by our own thoughts, in the midst of the reverses of life; to make ourselves a defence against ourselves, in opposing the calm of conscience to the irritation of temperament: this is true courage, in comparison with which, that which springs from instinct, is very little, and that which is the fruit of self-love, still less. Some people pretend,

that there are circumstances in which, feeling ourselves a burden upon others, we may make a duty of ridding them of the incumbrance. One of the great means of introducing errors in morality is, to fancy situations, to which there would be nothing to reply, if it were not that they do not exist. Who is so unfortunate as to find no fellow-creature to whom he may impart consolation? Who is so unhappy, that by his patience and his resignation, he may not give an example to move the soul, and give birth to sentiments, that the best precepts have never been able to inspire. The half of life is its decline: what has then been the intention of the creator in presenting this melancholy perspective to man, to man whose imagination has need of hope, and who counts as nothing what he has, except as the means of obtaining yet more! It is clear that the creator has willed that mortal man should obtain a mastery over self, and that he should commence this great act of disinterestedness long before the degradation of his strength should render it more easy to him.

When you reach the age of maturity, you are already in every thing reminded of your death. Do you marry your children? You make an estimate yourself of the fortune they may have when you shall be no more. Paternal duty consists in a continual devotion; and as soon as children attain the age of reason, almost all the enjoyments they afford are grounded on the sacrifices we make to them. If then happiness were the only end of life, we should destroy ourselves as soon as we cease to be young, as soon as we descend the mountain, whose summit appeared environed with so many brilliant illusions.

A man of wit, who was complimented on the fortitude with which he had supported great reverses, replied, 'I have sufficient consolation in being only twenty-five years old.' In fact, there are very few griefs more bitter than the loss of youth. Man accustoms himself to it by degrees, it will be said. Without doubt, time is an ally of reason, and weakens the resistance it meets with in us; but where is the impetuous soul, which is not irritated at the approaches of old age? Do the passions always decay with the faculties? Do we not often see the spectacle of the punishment of Mezentius renewed by the union of a soul still alive and a ruined body, inseparable enemies! Of what use would this sad herald be, which nature causes to precede dissolution, if it were not ordained that we should exist without happiness, and abdicate each day, flower after flower, the crown of life.

Savages, having no idea of the religious or philosophical destiny of man, believe they perform a duty to their parents by depriving them of life when they become old; this act is founded on the same principle as suicide. It is certain that happiness, in the acceptance given it by the passions, that the enjoyments of self-love at least, exist but in a small degree for old age; but it is this, which, by the development of moral dignity, seems to announce the approach of another life, as in the long days of the north, the twilight of the evening is confounded with the dawn of the ensuing day. I have seen these venerable countenances absorbed entirely with the future; they seem to announce, as a prophet, the old man who no longer interests himself with the remainder of his life, but is regenerated, by the elevation of his soul, as if he had already passed the barriers of the tomb. It is thus we must arm ourselves against misfortune; it is thus that in the strength of life itself, destiny often gives the signal of this detachment from existence, that time sooner or later exacts from us. 'You have very humble thoughts,' some men will say, convinced that pride consists in what we exact from destiny, and from others; while, on the contrary, it consists in what we exact from ourselves. These very men contrast Christianity with the philosophy of the ancients, and pretend that their doctrine was much more favorable to energy of character, than that whose

foundation is resignation: but certainly we must not confound resignation to the will of god with condescension to the power of man. Those heroic citizens of antiquity, who would have endured death rather than slavery, were capable of a pious submission to the power of heaven; while modern writers, who pretend that Christianity weakens the soul, could very well bend, notwithstanding their apparent strength, to tyranny, with more suppleness than a feeble but Christian-like old man.

Socrates, that saint of sages, refused to make his escape from prison after he was condemned to death. He believed he ought to set an example of obedience to the magistrates of his country, although they were unjust to him. Does not this sentiment belong to the true firmness of character? What greatness likewise was there not in that philosophical discourse on the immortality of the soul, continued so calmly, even to the very moment when the poison was brought to him! For two thousand years, men of profound thought, heroes, poets, and artists, have consecrated the death of Socrates by their praise; but the thousands of instances of suicide, caused by disgust and ennui, with which the annals of every corner of the world are filled, what traces have they left in the remembrance of posterity?

If the ancients were proud of Socrates, Christians, even without including the martyrs, can present a great number of examples of this noble strength of mind, in comparison with which the irritation or the depression, which leads us to destroy ourselves, is deserving only of pity. Sir Thomas More, Chancellor of Henry VIII., during a whole year of close confinement in the tower of London, refused day after day, the offers that an all-powerful king made him, to return to his service, if he would suppress the scruples of conscience which withheld him. Thomas More knew how to confront death during a year: and to abandon life, still loving it, redoubles the greatness of the sacrifice. A celebrated writer, he loved those intellectual occupations which fill every hour with a still increasing interest. A beloved daughter capable of appreciating the genius of her father, diffused an habitual charm throughout his household; he was in a dungeon, through the grates of which only a glimmering light, broken by the dark bars, could penetrate. While near this horrible abode, a delicious estate on the verdant borders of the Thames offered to him the union of every pleasure that the affection of his family and philosophical studies could impart. Nevertheless, he was immovable; the scaffold could not intimidate him: his health, cruelly impaired, weakened not his resolution; he found strength in that fire of the soul, which is inexhaustible because it is eternal. He met death because it was his choice, sacrificing happiness, with life, to conscience; immolating every enjoyment to this sentiment of duty, the greatest wonder of moral nature; that which fertilizes the heart, as, in physical order, the sun enlightens the world. England, the birth-place of this virtuous man, where so many other citizens have so unostentatiously sacrificed their lives to virtue, England, I say, is nevertheless the country in which suicide is most frequently committed: and we are, with reason, astonished that a nation, in which religion exercises so noble an empire, should offer the example of such an aberration: but they, who represent the English as cold in character, suffer themselves to be entirely deceived by the reserve of their manner. The English character, in general, is very active, and even impetuous; their admirable constitution, which develops the moral faculties in the highest degree, is of itself able to sustain their need of action and reflection; monotony of existence does not suit them, although they often inflict it upon themselves; they then diversify, by the exercises of the body, the sort of life which to us appears uniform.

No nation loves enterprise so much as the English.

and from one end of the world to the other, from the falls of the Rhine, to the cataracts of the Nile, if any thing singular and daring is attempted, it is by an Englishman. Extraordinary wagers, sometimes even blameable excesses, are a proof of the vehemence of their character. Their respect for all laws, that is to say, for moral law, for political law, and the laws of decorum, represses the outward indications of their natural ardor; but it does not the less exist; and when circumstances do not give it nourishment, when ennui takes possession of their lively imaginations, it produces in calculable ravages.

It is also maintained, that the climate of England tends particularly to melancholy: I cannot judge of it, for the sky of liberty has always appeared to me purer than any other; but I cannot think that we ought to attribute the frequent examples of suicide altogether to this physical cause. The climate of the north is much less agreeable than that of England, and yet they are less subject to disgust of life, because the mind has there less need of impulse and variety. Another cause also which renders suicide more frequent in England is the extreme importance which is attached to public opinion: as soon as a man's reputation is impaired, life becomes insupportable to him. This great dread of censure is certainly a very salutary restraint for most men; but there is something still more sublime in having an asylum in ourselves, and there to find, as in a sanctuary, the voice of god inviting us to repent of our faults, or recompensing us for our secret good intentions.

Suicide is very rare among the people of the south. The air they breathe attaches them to life; the empire of public opinion is less absolute in a country where there is less need of society; the enjoyments of nature suffice for the rich as well as the poor; there is something in the spring of Italy which communicates happiness to every being.

Germany furnishes many examples of suicide, but the causes are various, and often whimsical, as is natural amongst a people, where a metaphysical enthusiasm prevails, which has yet no fixed object nor useful end. The defects of the Germans are much more the result of their situation, than of their character, and they will no doubt correct them, when there shall exist among them a political state of things, that will call into action men worthy of being citizens.

An event that happened recently at Berlin, may give an idea of the singular exaltation of which the Germans are susceptible.\* The particular motives, which could lead any two individuals astray, are of little importance; but the enthusiasm with which an act has been spoken of, which ought rather to sue for indulgence, merits the most serious attention. If two persons, profoundly unhappy, had destroyed themselves after imploring the commiseration of sensible beings, and recommending themselves to the prayers of the pious, no one could have refused a tear to grief, that had driven them to distraction, whatever had been the species of folly to which it prompted. But can any one represent a mutual assassination as the sublime of reason, of religion, and of love! Can we give the name of virtue to the conduct of a woman, who voluntarily absolves herself from the duties of daughter, wife, and mother,—to that of a man who lends her his courage, thus to get rid of life!

What! this woman has sufficient confidence in the action she is committing, to write before she dies, 'that she will watch over her daughter from heaven:' and while the righteous often tremble on the bed of death,

\* M. de K — and Madame de V —, two persons of very estimable character, left Berlin, the place of their abode, towards the end of the year 1811, to repair to an inn at Potsdam, where they passed some time in taking refreshment, and in singing together the canticles of the holy sacrament. Then, by mutual consent, the man blew the woman's brains out, and killed himself the minute after. Madame de V — had a father, a husband, and a daughter. M. de K — was a poet, and an

she feels assured of celestial happiness! Two beings said to be estimable, introduce religion as a third, in the most bloody of actions! two Christians bring murder into comparison with the communion, by leaving open beside them the canticle, chanted by the faithful when they meet together to offer up their vows of obedience to the divine model of patience and resignation! What delirium in the woman, and what an abuse of faculties in the man! for must he not have regarded himself as an assassin, although he had obtained the consent of the wretched being he destroyed! Did the ever-fluctuating will of a human being give to a fellow-creature the right of infringing the eternal principles of justice and humanity! He killed himself, it will be said, almost at the same moment with his friend; but can any one believe he has so ferocious a right over the life of another, at the same time also that he takes away his own!

And had this man, who wished to die, no country! Could he not have fought for it! Was there no noble or perilous enterprise in which he might have set a glorious example! What is that he has given! He did not expect, I imagine, that mankind would one day agree to renounce, in the sight of heaven, the gift of life; and yet, what other consequence could be drawn from the suicide of these two persons, who, as is supposed, knew no other misfortune than that of existence!

What then: there remained to these faithful friends a year perhaps, at least a day, to see and hear each other, and they voluntarily destroyed this happiness. One of them was capable of deforming those features in which he had read noble thoughts; the other no longer wished to hear the voice which had excited them in her soul; and every thing descriptive of hatred they called love! The most perfect innocence, we are assured, was mingled with it; is this enough to justify so barbarous a weakness! And what advantage do not such delusions give to those who consider enthusiasm as an evil! True enthusiasm should be the companion of reason, because it is the heat that develops it. Can there exist opposition between two qualities natural to the soul, and which are both rays of the same fire! When we say that reason is irreconcilable with enthusiasm, it is because we put calculation in the place of reason, and folly in the place of enthusiasm. There is reason in enthusiasm, and enthusiasm in reason, whenever they spring from nature and are without any mixture of affectation.

We are astonished at discovering affectation and vanity in a suicide; those sentiments, so contemptible even in this life, what do they not become in the presence of death! It appears that nothing is so profound, nor so powerful, as to prove a barrier against the most terrible of acts: but man has so much difficulty in picturing to himself the end of his existence, that he associates even with the tomb the most miserable interests of this world. In fact, we cannot avoid discerning sentimental affectation on the one side, and philosophical vanity on the other, in the manner in which the double suicide at Berlin was accomplished. The mother sends her daughter to an entertainment the night before she intended to kill herself, as if the death of a mother ought to be considered as a festival by her child, and as if it were already necessary to fill her young heart with the most false impressions of a bewildered imagination! This mother clothes herself in new attire as a holy victim; in her letter to her family she enters into a minute detail of household affairs, in order to show her indifference as to the act she is about to commit; indifference, great god, in disposing of herself without thy order! in passing from life to death without the aid of duty or nature to overleap the abyss!

The man, who, about to kill his friend, solemnizes a festival with her, and excites himself by songs and liquors, as if he feared the return of just and reasonable emotions: this man, I say, does he not resemble an

other destitute of genius, who has recourse to a real catastrophe to produce effect she could not attain in fiction! True superiority of every kind has nothing of price in it: it is a more energetic and profound intensity in the impressions which the mass of mankind experiences. Genius is, in many respects, popular; but it is to say, it has points of contact with the manner in which most people feel. It is not thus, with a combastic mind, or a disordered imagination: those who torment themselves to attract public attention, by withdrawing it from others, fancy they have made discoveries in the unexplored regions of the human heart. They go so far as to imagine that what is revolting to the feelings of the greater part of the world is of a more elevated character than that which touches and captivates them. What a gigantic vanity is that which places us, if I may so speak, out of our kind. The eloquence and the inspiration of genius revives what had often existed in the hearts of the most obscure individuals, and subdues their apathy or vulgar interests. Great minds, by their writings or their actions, sometimes scatter the ashes which covered the sacred fire: but to create, so to speak, a new world, in which it will be virtuous to abandon our duties; religious, to rebel against divine authority; affectionate, to immolate what is dear to us; is the melancholy result of sentiments without harmony, of faculties without force, and of a desire of that celebrity, to the attainment of which, the gifts of nature are not subsidiary.

I should not have taken the pains to dwell upon an act of madness, which may be excused by peculiar circumstances, of the details of which we are to a certain extent ignorant, if the event had not found apologists in Germany. The taste of German writers for the spirit of hypothesis is found in almost all the relations of life; they cannot be prevailed upon to devote all the powers of the soul to simple and acknowledged truths; it may be said they are as ambitious to make innovations in sentiment and conduct as in literature. Yet physical nature invents nothing better than the sun, the sea, forests, and rivers. Why then should not the affections of the heart also be always the same in their principle although varied in their effects? Is there not much more soul in what is understood by all, than in these human creations, invented, so to speak, like a fiction made at pleasure!

The Germans are endowed with most excellent qualities, and most extensive understandings; but it is from books the greater part of them are formed, and the result is a habit of analysis and sophistry, a certain research after ingenuity, which effects, the manly decision of their conduct. The energy that knows not where to employ itself, inspires the most extravagant resolutions: but when they shall be able to consecrate their powers to the independence of their country, when they shall be regenerated as a nation, and thus reanimate the heart of Europe, paralyzed by slavery, we shall hear no more of sickly sentimentality; of literary suicides; of abstracted commentaries on subjects which shock the soul; they must then imitate those strong and hardy people of antiquity, whose character, constant, upright, and resolute, never suffered them to undertake any thing arduous without accomplishing it; who considered it as pusillanimous for a citizen to shrink from a patriotic resolution, as for a soldier to fly on the day of battle.

The gift of existence is a constant miracle; the thoughts and feelings, which compose it, have something so sublime in them, that we cannot, without astonishment, contemplate our being by the aid of the faculties of this being. Shall we then squander, in a moment of impatience and ennui, the breath by which we have felt love, recognized genius, and adored the deity? *Shakespeare says, in speaking of suicide,*

Let's do it after the high Roman fashion,  
And make death proud to take us."

In short, if we are incapable of that Christian resignation, which makes us submit to the ordeal of life, at least we should return to the classical beauty of character of the ancients, and make glory our divinity, when we do not feel ourselves able to sacrifice this glory itself to the highest of all virtues.

We believe we have shown that suicide, whose end is, to rid ourselves of life, carries with it no character of devotion to duty, and cannot, of course, merit the name of enthusiasm.

Genius, and even courage, are only worthy of commendation when they tend to this devotion, which is able to produce greater miracles than genius. We have seen the greatest ability overcome, but the combination of religious and patriotic sentiment never is subdued. There is nothing truly great without the mixture of some virtue; every other rule of judgment necessarily leads to error. The events of this world, however important they may appear to us, are sometimes moved by the smallest springs, and chance has much to do with them. But there is neither littleness nor chance in a generous sentiment; whether it impel us to offer up life, or only exact the sacrifice of a day; whether it win a diadem, or be lost in oblivion; whether it inspire master-pieces of art, or prompt to obscure benefits, is of no consequence; it is still a generous sentiment, and it is by this standard alone that man ought to admire the words and actions of man.

There are examples of suicide in the French nation, but we cannot generally attribute them to the melancholy of their character, nor to the elevation of their ideas. Positive evils have led some Frenchmen to this act, and they have committed it with intrepidity, but also with the thoughtlessness which often characterize them. Nevertheless, the multitude of emigrants, which the revolution produced, have supported the most cruel privations with a sort of equanimity, of which no other nation would have been capable. Their genius disposes them more to action than to reflection, and this manner of life diverts them from the troubles of existence. What cost most to Frenchmen is separation from their country; and, indeed, what a country was theirs before faction had rent, before despotism had degraded it! What a country should we not see regenerated, if it were the voice of the nation that disposed of it! Imagination paints to us this beautiful France, which would welcome us under its azure heavens:—those friends who would melt with tenderness in beholding us again;—those recollections of youth, those traces of our relatives we should find at every step: and this return appears to us like a terrestrial resurrection; like another life granted to us here below:—but, if celestial goodness has not reserved for us this happiness, wherever we may be, we will offer up our prayers for this country, which will be so glorious, if it ever learns to appreciate liberty, or, in other words, the political guarantee of justice.

#### NOTICE OF LADY JANE GRAY.

Lady Jane Gray was grand-niece of Henry VIII, by her grandmother Mary, sister of that king, and widow of Louis XII; she married Lord Guildford, son of the duke of Northumberland, who caused Edward, son of Henry VIII, to call him to the throne by his will, in 1533, to the exclusion of Mary and Elizabeth. Catherine of Arragon, was the mother of the former; her intolerant catholicism made her dreaded by the English Protestants,—and the birth of the daughter of Anna Boleyn was liable to be contested.

The duke of Northumberland urged these motives

—'And then, what's brave, what's noble,

Edward VI. Lady Jane Gray, not being herself satisfied of the validity of her right to the crown, refused at first to accede to the will of Edward, but at length the entreaties of her husband, whom she tenderly loved, and over whom Northumberland exercised great authority, drew from her the fatal consent they desired. She reigned nine days, or rather her father-in-law, the Duke of Northumberland, availed himself of her name to govern during that time.

Mary, eldest daughter of Henry VIII, however overcame her in spite of the resistance of the partisans of the reformation : and her cruel and vindictive character signalized itself by the death of the Duke of Northumberland, his son Guildford, and the innocent lady Jane Gray. She was but eighteen years of age when she perished : yet her name was celebrated for her profound knowledge of ancient and modern languages, and her letters in Latin and Greek, still extant, evince very uncommon faculties for her years. She possessed the most perfect piety, and her whole existence was marked by sweetness and dignity. Her father and mother strongly urged her, notwithstanding her repugnance, to ascend the throne of England ; her mother herself bore the train of her daughter on the day of her coronation ; and her father, the duke of Suffolk, made an attempt to revive her party, while she was still a prisoner, and had been for some months condemned to death. It was this attempt which served as a pretext for executing her sentence, and the Duke of Suffolk perished a short time after his daughter.

The following letter might have been written in the month of February, 1554. It is certain that at this period, which is that of the death of lady Jane Gray, she cultivated in her prison, a constant correspondence with her family and friends, and that even to her latest moments her philosophical disposition and religious firmness never forsook her.

*Lady Jane Gray to Doctor Aylmer.*

'It is to you, my worthy friend, I owe that religious instruction, that life of faith, which can alone endure for ever : my last thoughts are addressed to you in the solemn trial to which I am condemned. Three months have elapsed since the sentence of death, which the queen caused to be pronounced against my husband and myself, as a punishment for that unhappy reign of nine days, for that crown of thorns, which rested on my head only to mark it for destruction. I believed, I vow to you, that the intention of Mary was, to intimidate me by this sentence, but I did not imagine that she wished to shed my blood, which is also hers. It appeared to me my youth would have been sufficient to excuse me, when it should be proved that for a long time I resisted the melancholy honors with which I was menaced, and that my deference to the wishes of the Duke of Northumberland my father-in-law, was alone able to mislead me to the fault I have committed ; but it is not to accuse my enemies, I write to you ; they are the instruments of the will of god, like every other event of this world, and I ought to reflect but upon my own emotions. Enclosed in this tower, I live upon my thoughts, and my moral and religious conduct consists only in conflicts within myself.

Yesterday our friend Ascham came to see me, and the sight of him at first gave me a lively pleasure ; it recalled to my mind the recollection of the delightful and profitable hours I have passed with him in the study of the ancients. I wished to converse with him, only on those illustrious deaths, the descriptions of which have opened to me a train of reflections without end. Ascham, you know, is serious and calm ; he leans upon old age as a support against the evils of existence ; in fact, the old age of a reflecting being

sufficient to bear us over it ; the goal is yet nearer to me than to an old man, but the sufferings accumulated upon my last days will be bitter.

Ascham announced to me that the queen permitted me to breathe the air in the garden of my prison, and I cannot express the joy I felt at it ; it was such that our poor friend had not at first the courage to disturb it. We descended together, and he permitted me to enjoy for some time that nature of which I had been for several months deprived ; it was one of those days at the close of winter which announces spring. I know not if that beautiful season itself would so much have affected my imagination as this presentment of its return ; the trees turned their still leafless branches towards the sun ; the grass was already green ; a few premature flowers seemed, by their perfume, to form a prelude to the melody of nature, when she should reappear in all her magnificence ! The air was of an undefinable softness it seemed as if I heard the voice of god, in the invisible and all-powerful breath, which, at every moment restored me again to life ! What have I said ! I have thought until this day that it was my right, and now I receive its last benefits as the adieus of a friend.

I advanced with Ascham towards the borders of the Thames, and we seated ourselves in the yet leafless wood, which was soon to be clothed with verdure ; the waves seemed to sparkle with the reflection of the light of heaven ; but although this spectacle was brilliant as a festival, there is always something melancholy in the course of the waves and no one can long contemplate them, without yielding to those reveries whose charm consists, above every thing, in a sort of detachment from ourselves. Ascham perceived the direction of my thoughts, and suddenly seizing my hands, and bathing it with tears, 'Oh thou,' said he, 'who art ever my sovereign, is it for me to acquaint you with the fate which menaces you ? Your father has assembled your partisans to oppose Mary, and this queen, justly detested, charges you with all the love your name has excited.' His sobs interrupted him. 'Continue,' said I to him ; 'Oh, my friend, remember those contemplative beings, who with a firm countenance, have looked upon the death even of those who were dear to them ; they knew whence we came, and whether we go, that is enough. 'Well,' said he 'your sentence is to be executed, but, I bring that succor which has delivered so many illustrious men from the proscription of tyrants.' This old man, the friend of my youth, then tremblingly offered me the poison, with which he would have saved me, at the peril of his life. I remembered how often we had together admired certain voluntary deaths among the ancients, and I fell into profound reflection, as if the lights of Christianity were suddenly extinguished in me, and I was abandoned to that indecision, from which even man, in the most simple occurrence, finds so much difficulty in extricating himself. Ascham fell on his knees before me ; his gray head was bowed down in my presence, and covering his eyes with one hand, with the other he presented me the fatal resource he had prepared. I gently repulsed his hand ; and renovating myself through prayer, found power to answer him as follows—

'Ascham,' said I, 'you now with what delight I read with you the philosophers and poets of Greece and Rome ; the masculine beauties of their language, the simple energy of their minds, will for ever remain incomparable. Society, such as is constituted in our days, has filled most minds with frivolity and vanity, and we are not ashamed to live without reflection, without endeavoring to understand the wonders of the world, which are created to instruct man by brilliant and durable symbols. The ancients have gone much beyond us in this respect, because they made them-



the arts, even to the rules of conduct, every thing should have relation to religious faith, since life has no other end than to teach mortality. If I fly from the signal misfortune to which I am destined, I should not fortify, by my example, the hope of those on whom my fate ought to have an influence. The ancients elevated their souls by the contemplation of their own powers—Christians have a witness before whom they must live and die; the ancients sought to glorify human nature; Christians consider themselves but as the manifestation of god upon earth; the ancients placed in the first rank of virtues, that death which freed them from the power of their oppressors, Christians prefer that devotion, which subjects us to the will of Providence. Activity and patience have their times by turns; we must make use of our will as long as we may thus serve others and perfect ourselves; but when destiny is, in a manner, face to face with us, our courage consists in awaiting it; and to look steadily on our fate is more noble than to turn from it. The soul thus concentrating itself in its own mysteries, every external action becomes more terrestrial than resignation.' 'I will not seek,' said Ascham, 'to dispute with you opinions whose unshaken firmness may be necessary to you; I am troubled only on account of the sufferings to which your fate condemns you; will you be able to support them? And this expectation of a mortal stroke, of a fixed hour, will it not be beyond your strength? If you should terminate your fate yourself, would it not be less cruel?' 'We must,' replied I, 'let the divine spirit take back what he has given. Immortality commences on this side the tomb, when by our own will we break off with life; in this situation, the internal impressions of the soul are more delightful than you can imagine. The source of enthusiasm becomes altogether independent of the objects which surrounds us, and god alone then constitutes all our destiny, in the most inward sanctuary of our souls.' 'But,' replied Ascham, 'why give to your enemies, to the cruel queen, to a worthless crowd, the unworthy spectacle—'

He could not proceed.

'If I should free myself,' said I, 'even by death, from the fury of the queen, I should irritate her pride, and should not serve as the instrument of her repentance. Who knows how far the example I shall give may do good to my fellow-creatures? How can I judge of the place my remembrance shall occupy in the chain of the events of history? By destroying myself, what shall I teach man but the just horror inspired by a violent outrage, and the sentiment of pride which leads us to avoid it? But, in supporting this terrible fate by the firmness which religion imparts to me, I inspire vessels, beaten, like myself, by the storm, with a greater confidence in the anchor of faith, which has sustained me.'

'The people,' said Ascham, 'believe all those guilty who perish as criminals.' 'Falsehood,' replied I, 'may deceive individuals for a while, but nations and time always make truth triumphant: there is an eternity for all that belongs to virtue, and what we have done for her will advance even to the sea, however small the rivulet we may have been during our life.'

'No, I shall not blush to submit to the punishment of the guilty, for it is my innocence itself calls me to it, and I should impair this sentiment of innocence by perpetrating an act of violence; we cannot accomplish it ourselves, without disturbing the serenity the soul should feel on its approach towards heaven—' 'Oh! what is there more violent,' cried our friend, 'than this bloody death?' 'Is not the blood of martyrs,' replied I, 'a balm for the wounds of the unfortunate?' 'This death,' answered he, 'inflicted by man, by the murderous ax, that a ruffian shall dare to raise over your royal head?' 'My friend,' said I, 'if my last moments were encompassed with respect, they would not be the

less inspire me with dread; does death bear a diadem on his pale front? Is he not always armed with the same terrors? If it were to *nothing* he conducted us, would it be worth while to dispute with this shadow? If it is the call of god through this veil of darkness, then day is behind this night, and heaven is coucealed from us only by vain phantoms.'

'What!' said our friend, with a still agitated voice, and whom, at all other times, I had seen so calm, 'are you aware that this punishment may be grievous, that it may be protracted, that an unskillful hand—' 'Stop,' said I, 'I know it, but this will not be.' 'Whence comes this confidence?' 'From my own weakness,' replied I. 'I have always dreaded physical suffering, and my efforts to acquire courage to brave it, have been vain. I believe, therefore, I shall be always spared it; for there is much secret protection extended towards Christians, even when they seem most miserable, and what we feel to be above our strength, scarcely ever happens to us. We generally know only the exterior of man's character; what passes within himself, may still afford new hints during thousands of ages. Irreligion has rendered the mind superficial; we are captivated by the external appearance of things, by circumstance, by fortune; the true treasures of thought, as well as of imagination, are the relations of the human heart with its creator; there are to be found presentiments, there prodigies, there oracles, and all that the ancients believed they saw in nature, was but the reflection of what they experienced within themselves, without their knowledge.'

Ascham and I were silent for some time; an uneasiness pervaded me, and I dared not express it, so much did it trouble me. 'Have you seen my husband?' said I. 'Yes,' replied Ascham. 'Did you consult him on the offer you were about to make me?' 'Yes,' answered he again. 'Finish, I pray you,' said I. 'If Guildford and my conscience do not agree, which of these two powers should be imperative on me?' 'Lord Guildford,' said he, 'did not express an opinion on the part you ought to take, but, as to him, his resolution to perish on the scaffold, is immovable.' 'Oh, my friend,' cried I, 'how I thank you for having left me the merit of a choice; if I had sooner known of the resolution of Guildford, I should not even have deliberated, and love would have been sufficient to animate me to what religion commands. Should I not share the fate of such a husband? Should I spare myself a single one of his sufferings? And does not every step of his towards death mark my path also?' Ascham then perceiving my resolution not to be shaken, departed from me, sad and pensive, promising to see me again.

Doctor Feckenham, chaplain to the queen, came a few hours after, to announce to me, that the day of my death was fixed for the next Friday, from which five days still separated me. I acknowledge to you, it seemed as if I were prepared for nothing, so much did the designation of a day appal me. I tried to conceal my emotion, but Feckenham undoubtedly perceived it, for he hastened to avail himself of my trouble, to offer me life, if I would change my religion. You see, my worthy friend, that God came to my assistance at that moment, for the necessity of repulsing an offer, so unworthy of me, restored to me the strength I had lost.

Doctor Feckenham wished to enter into controversy with me, which I prevented, by observing to him, 'that my understanding being necessarily obscured by the situation in which I was placed, I should not, dying as I was, discuss truths of which I had been convinced when my mind was in all its strength.' He endeavored to intimidate me, by saying that he should see me no more, neither in this world nor in heaven, from which my religious belief had excluded me. 'You would occasion me more alarm than my executioners,' replied I, 'if I could believe you; but the religion to which sacrifice life, is always the true one for the heart.'



light of reason is very vacillating in questions of such moment, and I cling to the principle of sacrifice ; of that I can have no doubt.'

This conversation with doctor Feckenham revived my dejected soul ; providence had just granted what Ascham desired for me, a voluntary death ; I did not destroy myself, but I refused to live ;—and the scaffold, accepted by my will, seemed no longer but as the altar chosen by the victim. To renounce life when we can purchase it but at the price of conscience, is the only kind of suicide which should be permitted to a virtuous being.

Convinced I had done my duty, I dared to count upon my courage ; but soon again my attachment to existence, with which I had sometimes reproached myself, in the days of my felicity, revived in my feeble heart. Ascham came again the next day, and we visited once more the borders of the Thames, the pride of our delightful country. I endeavored to resume my habitual subjects of conversation. I recited some passages from the beautiful poetry of the Iliad and from Virgil, that we had studied together ; but poetry serves above all, to penetrate us with a tender enthusiasm for existence ; the seductive mixture of thoughts and images, of nature and the soul, of harmony, of language, and of the emotions it retraces, intoxicates us with the power of feeling and admiring ; and these pleasures no longer exist for me ! I then turned the conversation to the more severe writings of the philosophers. Ascham considers Plato as a soul predestined to Christianity ; but even he, and the greater part of the ancients, are too proud of the intellectual strength of the human mind ; they enjoy so much of the faculty of thought, that their desires do not lead them towards another life ; they believe they can produce an evocation of it in themselves, by the energy of contemplation : I also once derived the purest delight from meditating upon heaven, genius, and nature. At the remembrance of this, a senseless regret of life took possession of me. I represented it to myself in colors compared with which, the world to come appeared no more than an abstraction destitute of charms. 'How,' said I to myself, 'will the eternal duration of sentiment be equal to this succession of hope and fear, which renews, in so lively a manner, the tenderest affections ? Will the knowledge of the mysteries of the universe ever equal the inexpressible attraction of the veil which covers them ? Will certainty have the flattering illusion of doubt ? Will the brilliancy of truth ever afford as much enjoyment, as the research and the discovery of it ? What will youth, hope, memory, affection be, if the course of time is arrested ? In fine, can the supreme being, in all his glory, give to the creature a more enchanting present than love ?'

I humbly confess to you, my worthy friend, that these fears were impious. Ascham, who, in our conversation the evening before, had appeared less religious than myself, at once availed himself of my rebellious grief. 'You ought not,' said he, 'to make use of benefits to cast a doubt upon the power of the benefactor, whose gift is this life that you regret ! And if its imperfect enjoyments seem to you so valuable, why should you believe them irreparable ? Certainly our imagination it-

self may conceive of something better than this earth ; but, if it be unequal to this, is it for us to consider the deity merely as a poet, who is unable to produce a second work superior to the first ?' This simple reflection restored me to myself, and I blushed at the obliquity into which the dread of death had betrayed me ! Oh ! my friend ! what it costs me to fathom this thought ! Abysses, still deeper and deeper, open under each other !

In four days I shall no longer exist ; that bird which flies through the air will survive me ; I have less time to live than he ; the inanimate objects which surround me will preserve their form, and nothing of me will remain upon earth, but the remembrance of my friends. Inconceivable mystery of the soul, which foresees its end here below, and yet cannot prevent it. The hand directs the coursers who conduct us : thought cannot obtain a moment's victory over death ! Pardon my weakness, oh my father in religion, you, who have so tenderly cherished me : we shall be reunited in heaven ; but shall I still hear that affecting voice which revealed to me a god of mercy ? Shall these eyes contemplate your venerable features ? Oh, Guildford ! oh, my husband ! you whose noble figure is unceasingly present to my heart, shall I behold you again, such as you are, among the angels whose image you are upon earth ? But what do I say ? My feeble soul desires nothing beyond the tomb but the actual return of life !—

#### THURSDAY.

My husband has requested to see me to-day for the last time. I have avoided that moment in which joy and despair would be too closely blended. I dreaded the loss of the resignation I now feel. You have seen that my heart has had but too much attachment to happiness ; let me not relapse into it again. My father, do you approve of me ? Has not this sacrifice expiated all ? I no longer fear that existence will still be dear to me.

#### THE MORNING OF THE EXECUTION.

Oh ! my father ! I have seen him ! he marched to his execution with as firm a step as if he had commanded those by whom he was conducted. Guildford raised his eyes towards my prison, then directed them still higher ; I understood him : he continued on his way. At the turn of the road which leads to the place where death is prepared for both of us, he stopped to behold me once more ; his last looks blessed her, who was his companion upon the throne and upon the scaffold !

#### AN HOUR AFTER.

They have carried the remains of Guildford under the windows of the tower ; a sheet covered his mutilated corpse ;—through his sheet a horrible image presented itself. If the same stroke was not reserved for me, could earth support the weight of my affliction ? My father, how could I regret life so deeply ? Oh holy death ! gift of heaven as well as life ! thou art now my tutelary angel ! thou restorest me to serenity ! my sovereign master has disposed of me, but since he will reunite me to my husband, he has demanded nothing of me surpassing my strength, and I replace my soul without fear in his hands !

